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**Disintegration of Essence and Subjectivity: the Poetry of
Charles Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot**

by

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To my family

To Chen, Kuan-Hua

THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis elaborates upon Charles Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot's poetic negotiation of the erosion of the essentialist cognitive and moral foundations that hypothetically monitor human praxis and cement a stable subjectivity on the basis of the human subjects' co-inhering in a common horizon of understanding. I contend that Baudelaire's work consciously belaboured the collapse of vaulting cognitive frameworks and testimonial accountability in a way that reveals both the historical and trans-historical dimensions of the non-integratability of experience within a modern economy of existence. His work eschews the trappings of both aestheticism (history being one of its explicit and pervasive concerns) and historicism, since it reveals parameters of the reification of organic experience that are intrinsic to language and specific to the mnemonic abridgement of the subject's experiential trajectory. Moreover, Baudelaire's poetry compels the critique of the aesthetic abstraction from the social being of man, and solicits scepticism vis-à-vis straight historicism's teleological infrastructures and collateral crypto-transcendentalist angles. The examined poetry exposes the inner complicity of the two perspectives in question latent beneath their surface mutual closure.

I examine T. S. Eliot's work in order to address the anti-essentialist motifs of his poetry in counterpoint to his literary criticism, and reveal the dialectic of cultural determinism (mostly materialising in the latter) and radical impersonality that resumes modernity's aporetic necessity to deploy egological categories within an agenda that has invalidated any notion of essence fundamentals sustaining human experience. His poetry's homeopathic re-enactment of the experiential fragmentation that it thematically laments constitutes the privileged terrain whereupon essentialist construals of human subjectivity and history can be revealed to be inherently ideological.

I have throughout drawn on Walter Benjamin's understanding of allegory and memory, along with Paul de Man's enhancement of the antagonism of the material and transcendental axes endemic in language and cognitive anchoring. This thesis explores the problematisation of essentialist configurations of subjectivity and history in the poetry of the archetypal poet of modernity, and the mutations they submitted to when they were inscribed within an aesthetic and political agenda that was far more reluctant to relinquish egological paradigms of communication and subjectivity. The underlying concern has been to elucidate Baudelaire's inexhaustible wealth of responsiveness vis-à-vis the collapse of organic experience, and his resistance to both historicist and reductively aesthetic appropriations. This thesis has aimed to analyse his treatment of experiential disintegration as an effect of historical juncture along with his welcoming address of cognitive and experiential reification as the outcome of the differential and semiotic character of language and memory.

INTRODUCTION

PREMISES AND METHODOLOGY: ESSENTIALISM, HISTORY, SUBJECTIVITY

...the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars and revolutions.

De Man, *Blindness and Insight*

The aim of this dissertation is to question essentialist construals of cognition and analogical representation of experience vis-à-vis the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot. The thematic and rhetorical fibre of their work will be analysed with the aim to reveal its resistance to critically sanctioned adequations of origin and prescribed telos, linguistic performance and cognitively owned experience, and, most of all, the trappings of aestheticism and historicism. The poetry of Baudelaire and Eliot has been chosen on account of its inexhaustibly anti-essentialist potential and as a paradigm of resistance to the above adequations. The diagnostic protocols that sustain the argumentative framework interrogate the conception of literary modernity as an event that can be affixed a historical index. One of the undergirding caveats throughout is that modernist poetry enhances what has potentially lain dormant within "pre-modern" paradigms as language's intrinsic antagonism of axes. Historicism-oriented criticism has fallaciously understood the rhetorical dimension inherent in modernist poetry to be referable to, and exhausted within, empirically verifiable realities susceptible to periodisation. This empiricist verification has strategically weakened the signification and social potential of the targeted works by assigning them the status of a finished, if not inherently abortive, project. Any negotiation of modernist literarity, accordingly, cannot but play out the collision of the two

spheres, the rhetorical and historical, while simultaneously being challenged to address the containment of literary modernity within a genetic and horizontal historical vista. I aim to polarise the tenacity of this asymmetrical interlocking. There has been a massive and multi-faceted investment in sanctioning the mutual penetration of the two realms on the basis of a putative co-sharing in essence. The intention is to show the reductive and self-justificatory character of this logic which, typically, fails to accede to the contingent dimension of its own veracity in terms other than subliminal. Its correlative aesthetics of immanent metaphoricity and symbolisation concerning both language and reality data are invalidated by Eliot and Baudelaire's work, as I will argue further on.

The examined poetry exemplifies the resistance to the conjuring of temporality as difference counterpointed to egological consciousness and as difference *with* self. Instead, *The Waste Land* shapes experience and the temporal realm so that the self-identity of its age, of any age, is exposed as internally fissured, divided, subject to non-sublimatable finitude. Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens* stake their self-understanding on categories of urban modernity sanctioned by his contemporary collective imaginary and imposed by the specific historical conjuncture. Yet, the crisis-oriented reason that infuses them exceeds their chronological containment. Baudelaire's poetic enterprise leverages the unseating of essentialism and its correlative historicist affidavits. In Derrida's words, "this self-difference, this difference *to self* [*à soi*], and not simply *with* self, makes life hard if not impossible for historical science. But inversely, would there be any history, would anything ever *happen*, without this principle of disturbance? Would there be any event without this disturbance of the

principality?"¹ The examined poetry solicits the understanding of history and experience in terms that eschew the cognitive and semantic comfort of phenomenism and analogical representation. Within its textual space, history and subjectivity shape up in a differential, diacritical mode. The French poet's work countenances experiences that resist assimilation within over-arching conceptual and moral frameworks. It is sceptical towards the capacity of language to rescue experience, or serve as a testimonial corroboration of it in the interest of ontologising historical and subjective self-transparency. In distinction to the universality of *Aufhebung*, Baudelaire and Eliot's work does not relate to reality as a predicate of immutable essences but, on the contrary, interrogates the ontology of genetic grounding vis-à-vis human subjectivity and historical necessity.

Baudelaire and Eliot exhibit a sobering awareness of the holistic proclivities of history. They belong in a group of modernist authors who poetically registered their unease with cumulative and restorative configurations of experience and history. The former's "mémoire du présent"² names the fallaciousness of horizontal history, of any genetic stringing out of witnessed experience. As Paul de Man writes, the literary history whose taking place as an actual sequence in time is but a metaphor "making a sequence out of what occurs in fact as a synchronic juxtaposition [of the time-free immediacy of (writing)]

¹ See Jacques Derrida, "To Do Justice to Freud," in *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, Michael Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 108.

² The following edition will be used throughout: Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975). Hereafter abbreviated as OC and cited parenthetically whenever necessary. The following will be used alongside whenever the translations are not mine: Charles Baudelaire, *The Complete Verse*, trans. and ed. Francis Scarfe, 2 vols. (London: Anvil Press, 1986). Hereafter abbreviated as CV. For "mémoire du présent" and "représentation du présent" see "Le peintre de la vie moderne," OC II: 684; translated as "The Painter on Modern Life," in *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. P. E. Charvet (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

experience and the return to a temporal dialectic]" can serve as a paradigm for history in general. The mutual illumination of the two spheres emanates from the fact that "man himself, like literature, can be defined as an entity capable of putting his own mode of being into question."³

I have subtly drawn on Jacques Lacan's ~~semiotic~~ ^{semiotic psychoanalytical theory} and, mostly, Paul de Man's theory of rhetoric since they bear down upon all endeavours to assign man a nature and a concomitant concept that will exhaust his significations within essentialist demarcations. They both countenance the non-sublimatable finitude undergirding human affairs.⁴ It is also their scepticism towards the analogical foundations of most representational modes that integrates them smoothly to this project.⁵ The examined texts endorse the potential of language to disrupt the rapport of phenomena with cognition transpiring through the arbitration of analogism. De Man's theory of rhetoric is particularly apt to help shed light upon poetic discourses that are inimical to the edging of the linguistic body to a

³ De Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1983), 163-5.

⁴ See John Forrester, *Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 296, apropos of Lacan's work: "[It] directly addresses the question of the *possibility* of representation --whether of conflict, of desire, or of signification -- by expecting it precisely in that most contradictory of places, the unconscious." Forrester condenses Michel Foucault's positive valorisation of psychoanalysis in the final pages (especially 373-376) of *Les mots et les choses/The Order of Things*, trans. unknown (London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1989). Foucault's stance will gradually inflect to overt criticism culminating in the *History of Sexuality* Vol. I, *An Introduction* (London: Penguin, 1990). See particularly p.159 *passim*.

⁵ The version of psychoanalysis upon which I have cautiously drawn bears the traits of a non-anthropological understanding. As will become clearer I do not endorse analysis *in toto* as a discourse that zeroes in on the hypothetical fundamentals conditioning human behaviour. The aspects of it that are relevant to my work are summarised in Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 374. Non-anthropological psychoanalysis "moves towards the moment ... at which the contents of consciousness articulate themselves, or rather stand gaping, upon man's finitude. This means that, unlike the human sciences, which, even while turning back towards the unconscious, always remain within the space of the representable, psychoanalysis advances and leaps over representation, overflows it on the side of finitude." Again, analysis' susceptibility to essentialist appropriations is always borne in mind.

cognition server via analogical representation.⁶ *Les Fleurs du mal* and *The Waste Land* complicate the alignment of cognition and phenomenism by, among other strategies, bringing the non-assimilable materiality of the letter into sharp relief. Baudelaire inscribes this materiality on the oversexed yet unyielding body and the non-reciprocating, non-auratic gaze. Discursive materiality vis-à-vis the consolidation of reference and cognition constitutes a perpetual principle of disturbance which Eliot's essays attempted to cover up. I will explain how his axiomatic criticism was erected in distinction to his poetic language and the way his postural inscription within a commonality of concerns between him and the French modernists (Baudelaire especially) concealed his strategic smoothing over of dispersed subjectivity into dominant cultural norms and moral hegemony. I will read in the tense counterpoint of his criticism and poetry the dialectic of blindness and insight that is endemic in large segments of modernist poetry that address the impossibility of binding reference to cognition in essentialist terms, and the corresponding theory that tries to account for it.

The textual subjects' insecurity concerning the testimonial processing of reality will be argued to be prototypical of another abortive accession, the one to macro-history. The Baudelairean subjects' difficulty in acceding to the veracity of their personal histories has been treated as a micro-scale model for the impossibility of appropriating experiential contents and making them cohere with vaulting explanatory, historical arch-structures. A version of memory that is

⁶ Baudelaire has consistently attracted de Man's attention. See among others, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 239-262; "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 173-209; "Literary History and Literary Modernity," and "Lyric and Modernity," in *Blindness and Insight*, 142-65 and 166-86 respectively; "Allegory and Irony in Baudelaire," in *Romanticism and*

based on diacritical difference instead of the intuitive or empathetic re-possession of experiential nuclei will be counterpointed to the mechanism whereby accession to history is clogged up. Baudelaire cannot have been aware of the conflict of the material and transcendental dimensions of (poetic) language in the terms with which we can address it now. However, his poetry constitutes the privileged terrain where we recognise this conflict since it incorporated and explicitly addressed the antagonism of aestheticism and historicism, and revealed through recourse to lyrical allegory the material/sensuous recalcitrance of language to conceptual and hermeneutic appropriations. Also, Baudelaire's overt engagement with the concept of modernity points to a relatively conscious awareness on his side of the stakes involved.⁷

I have also deployed notions deriving from Michel Foucault's work since I believe that the examined poetry questions the inundation of existence with essence that is supposed to monitor history's trajectories, a theme that he has worked through extensively.⁸ The transcendental constitution that Foucault critically addresses has been poetically elaborated by Baudelaire and Eliot in a fashion one cannot write off to a modernist centrifugation that would ultimately refine categories of subjectivity and organic history. The examined poetry, especially *The Waste Land*, is deeply aporetic. It underscores the aporia befalling all attempts at erecting transcendent meaning and securing its concomitant egological meta-awareness setting off from empirical confrontations of reality.

Contemporary Criticism: the Gauss Seminar and Other Papers, ed. E S. Burt, Kevin Newmark, Andrzej Warminski (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 101-19.

⁷ See, indicatively, Baudelaire, "The Painter on Modern Life," 390-435; esp. 390-409.

⁸ The safest denominator one can abstract from his work is his refusal to think in terms of essence fundaments, whether in the field of history, politics or sexuality. For his complication of

Derrida has formulated the historicist paradox succinctly: "The transcendental condition of a series is also, paradoxically, a part of that series, creating aporias for the constitution of any set or whole, particularly, of any historical configuration (age, *episteme*, paradigm, *themata*, epoch, and so on)."⁹ The poetry corroborates the hypothesis that history can no longer be experienced as the overarching synthesising nexus of metaphorisable and mutually reverberating events, and invites us "to understand the original [the supposedly witnessable event] from the perspective of the translation [language, memory]."¹⁰ The substructure intertwining history and language admits of neither mimesis nor empathy.

Chapters one to eight address the particular modes that sexuality, subjectivity, essence, and certain mnemonic fixations assume in the service of a depletion of subjectivity and essentiality in Baudelaire's poetry, and its commensurate placement of historicist perspectives in an unsettling abeyance. It will be argued that Baudelaire's centrality as the Modernist poet *par excellence* can be attributed not only to his responding to the political and aesthetic upheavals of the 19th century. More significantly, Baudelaire will be seen to embody an awareness of the tropological underpinnings of reason and the mnemonic upheaval of linear construals of historical experience. This awareness exposes the parasitism of all transcendentalisms upon language and finitude. It exceeds, and controverts, the conjunctural moorings of various historicisms since

the imbrication of subject and history see, indicatively, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 202-3.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, "To Do Justice to Freud," in *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, 79.

¹⁰ Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 82.

it cuts deep into what irreducibly undergirds them. His insights will be related to a particular mode of remembering that organises his conceptual field, and an idiosyncratic way of *seeing* that subtends the scopic realm of his work. The distinction between *Erfahrung* (experience and remembrance whose value emanates from a commonality of concerns within a society bound up by tradition) and *Erlebnis* (memory dissociated from vaulting cognitive and moral frameworks) is crucial to my understanding of the poetry. Walter Benjamin's belabouring of the conceptual and historical parameters of remembrance and experience will be a constant throughout. It is through these mnemonic and specular grids that a fragile and non-egological subjectivity remains visible in the case of the emblematically modern Baudelairean subjects. My ultimate thesis in the interest of which I have deployed and qualified the above notions is that Baudelaire's oeuvre exhibits a dual resistance to both historicist and aestheticist appropriations and constitutes the privileged terrain whereupon the internal complicity of these apparently antithetical zones can be exposed. This complicity derives from the subtle imbrication of essentialist construals of human experience and history into both historicist agendas and aestheticist projects. The former fail to address the necessarily extra-historical perspective from which they supervise human praxis whereas the latter idealise language as the ultimate reservoir of cognitive potential in an attempt to stave off the commodification of the work of art under market conditions. I argue that Baudelaire's poetry combines awareness of its historical contingency with an unsettling insight into the trans-historical dimensions of testimonial unaccountability and withering of experience.

Chapter One engages Walter Benjamin's understanding of allegory. I explain its relevance to approaching Baudelaire's work and the way I will be using it throughout. Chapter Two addresses Baudelaire's voiding of naturalty within sexuality, and argues for comprehending the latter in the context of a cleavage between perception and cognition. The third chapter embeds the poetry's delineation of subjectivity within a selective genealogy of concerns and argues for its understanding within the broader horizon enabled by the German Romantics' notion of the Work in Progress and their grasp of subjectivity as the discursive space wherein poetic and/or philosophical discourse can materialise. Baudelaire's underlying suspiciousness of creative geniality shows through the dialogical, contractual, and inter-textual economy of his poetry.¹¹ The genealogical links I have traced have been enabled by the revisionist labour of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, among others.¹² They do not reflect any conscious adoption of strategies or themes on the part of Baudelaire, but simply the reverberation of his concerns within a compatible echoing chamber. The presuppositions sustaining the "new" reading that the above authors propose are equally, if not more, important to the articulation of my broader argumentative framework. Chapter Four "dialogically" engages, and then cautiously departs from, Walter Benjamin's views on memory in order to put the accent on the destructive way in which memory impacts on linear embedments of experience. I address the issue of Baudelairean correspondences and explain how they are

¹¹ For the dialogical, intersubjective and contractual character of Baudelaire's poetry see Barbara Blood, *Baudelaire and the Aesthetics of Bad Faith* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 8. On intertextuality in Baudelaire see Barbara Johnson, "Les Fleurs du mal armé: Some Reflections on Intertextuality," in *Lyric Poetry Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chavina Hôsek and Patricia Parker (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 264-80.

¹² References are placed in the relevant chapters.

internally fissured by temporality. This latter causes the retrieval of past plenitude to abort. One of the underlying premises of this dissertation is that Baudelairean memory marks a rupture with genetic conceptions of anamnesis as retrieval of experiential contents and restitution of essences. Baudelairean memory is then treated in counterpoint to Hegelian *Gedächtnis* as read by Paul de Man, that is, a memory that obeys the dictates of mechanical inscription away from any notion of a reproducible ideality of content. Chapter Five analyses Baudelaire's "Le Cygne," a poem that condenses most of the problematics that his poetry hosts. From the delirious unhinging of the mnemonic trajectory from any sense-stabilising conceptual frameworks to the allegorical counter-image of history as the trauma-infused terrain where understanding and remembering are in a position of mutual closure, the resistance of memory and experience to the defensive horizontal assimilation of perceived and recollected scenes is put into relief. The text leverages the semantic unresolve that inheres in any endeavour to append experience to a genetically bound history. The sixth chapter enhances the ruination of experience the poetry responds to by, initially, focusing on the cleavage between perception and cognition that a poem such as "Les Sept Vieillards" negotiates. The Baudelairean subjects operate in the grip of a *literal memory* whose targets cannot be imbued with any symbolic or associative potential whatsoever. As such, they expose the internal, and primarily temporal, rift separating experience from the distilment of its meaning. This rift renders the closure of essence and cognition impossible. I analyse "Les Sept Vieillards" with the aim to clarify the nature of this cleavage. I then offer my understanding of Baudelaire's urban sublime in the qualifying context of a material, non-cognitive,

non-auratic gaze which I nuance in counterpoint to the one that Paul de Man read within the Kantian sublime. Chapter Seven debates the historical and transhistorical dimensions of Baudelaire's poetry and rounds off assumptions that were topically tested in the previous sections. The poetry's openness to history was accompanied by an aesthetic alertness that transcended the configuration of the human dimension within historical experience in terms of macro-consciousness cumulatively augmenting its understanding and recognition of itself. Chapter Eight recapitulates Baudelaire's dual resistance to aestheticism and historicism. I argue for the constructive character of Baudelairean melancholia and counter the notion that allegorical melancholy undercuts the notional infrastructures of any solidaristic politics of recollection that aims to redress past injustice by challenging their viability. Baudelaire's melancholy allegories call for the re-negotiation of the conceptual categories with which we engage praxis, history, and subjectivity. The underlying tenet throughout is that Baudelaire's poetry makes a point of failing to produce the concept of cognitive wholeness that it promises and stages this failure as a binding condition. In its non-reversible dispersal of sexual identity, subjectivity and harmony of consciousness and reality, it voids all hermeneutic efforts accruing upon the homology between consciousness and factual givens. Chapter Nine sets off by zeroing in on the way T. S. Eliot twisted inherited configurations of dispersed subjectivity into his notion of impersonality, and his implantation of a pre-modern aesthetic of ocular plenitude and reality-transparent signification within a literary theory that purported to account for modern discursivity and a poetic practice that was hailed as a modern arch-paradigm. His configuration of subjectivity and notion of

allegory and ocular-versus-auditory imagination are examined in distinction to Baudelaire and Benjamin's' construals of allegory and imagery. I discern within "The Hollow Men" the treatment of an inherently abortive attempt to affirm a history-transcending ocular and experiential plenitude. Then I dissect Eliot's demand that language be transparent to reality givens and counterpoint it to the centrifugal inclinations of his poetry that undercut the above dependency. In Chapter Ten I read "Prufrock" within a Lacanian framework of concerns, and counter more phenomenological accounts of the text. I see the text as exposing the dependency of subjectivity upon a self-undermining self-affection that hankers after an unattainable, reality-binding afflatus of sense. Finally, I approach *The Waste Land* intending to enhance what I regard as a homeopathic, mythopoetic and self-destructive textual response to what is endured as collapse of history and experience. The text recapitulates the tense counterpoint of essence and aleatoriness that materialises between the essays and the poetry. It is pervaded by mourning over the disintegration of organic ; history, yet voices the predicament in a mode that replicates the fragmentation to such a degree that no mitigation can be effected through the stylistic absorption of its tremors. "The Preludes" are seen to subtly engage a notion of unverbalisable experience constituted in the interspace between discursive externalisation and denial. There are sporadic references to the *Four Quartets*, which text, however, has not met with a proper analysis. It constitutes the climactic instance of a trajectory whose inceptive moment goes back to *Ash-Wednesday* and bears the traits of Eliot's steadily increasing engagement with the notion of extra-historical transcendental conditioning of human experience and history. Due to the magnitude of the work,

its full treatment would exceed by far the limits of this dissertation. Its omission does not detract from the consolidation of my argument since the poem constitutes the intensification and refinement¹³ of concerns that were already incorporated in the poetry I examine.¹³ Besides, the aim is not to contrast Baudelaire and Eliot's entire output, but to elucidate the particular inflections that the dissolution of subjectivity and essence assumes in their work as well as expose the inner complicity of both historicism and aestheticism with essentialist construals of history and human praxis through a close reading of selected texts. More space has been allocated the French poet because I find his work significantly more crucial to the debunking of essentialist models of history and understanding. Eliot's perversion of anti-essentialist motifs that he inherited from the French moderns, and the agonal relation of his poetry to his criticism, are intrinsic to this project's theoretical framework in a sense that an either more insular/"philological" or a purely comparative approach to his work ~~is~~ not.

Ultimately, my aim has been to enhance what I discern as the poetry's integration of the tension-fraught relation of the performative, constative, figural and semantic strata binding the textual wholes. I will therefore sustain a critical attitude with regard to sanctioned configurations of circular organicity vis-à-vis poetic discourse. Nowhere else has the dissolution of essence and its correlative disintegration of subjectivity assembled its potentialities and the unsettling implications of its meaning as in Baudelaire and Eliot's poetry. It is to their

¹³ I am not advocating a logic of preformationism here. A potential continuity or climaxing of concerns can only be *conferred* in retrospect without this conferral necessarily entailing that an entelechic infrastructure has predetermined the particular character that the discursive output *will* assume. The *Four Quartets* do not simply resume what lay dormant in the previous poetry in embryonic form. Nevertheless, I do not believe that it can make a substantial contribution to the hypothesis that this project puts to the test.

enrichment of what underlies this dissolution, i.e., an endemic crisis of reason,
that this project responds.

CHAPTER ONE

BENJAMIN'S *TRAUERSPIEL*, ALLEGORY, HISTORY

Baroque allegory sees the corpse only
from the outside. Baudelaire sees it from
the inside.

Benjamin, "Central Park"

Allegorical representation and historical mindfulness

Walter Benjamin's study on baroque *Trauerspiel*¹ offers invaluable insight into the intricate mechanisms of allegory in the context of an overall discussion that debates the divides between Classicism and (German) Romanticism. On the basis of this, I will relate his understanding of allegory to the particular inflection that Baudelaire gave it and will frame the tensional relation of allegory and essence into the broader context of the tropological underpinnings of discourse and the rhetorical dimension of (poetic) reason.

According to Benjamin's study the primary difference between symbolic and allegorical representation revolves around the determining agency of temporality. In a language that anticipates subsequent theoretical developments Benjamin configures temporality in terms that relate it to the temporal cleavage between, and irreducible non-commensurability of, the apposite poles that serve as the external limits of the allegorical trajectory. "The distinction between the two modes [between the allegorical and the symbolic mode] is therefore to be sought in the momentariness which allegory lacks There [in the symbol] we

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1977); pages 159-235 ("Allegory and *Trauerspiel*") are particularly relevant to my argument.

have momentary totality; here we have progression in a series of moments."² In other words, the difference-introducing mobility of time that punctuates the allegorical grid comes to defuse the mystical instantaneity of the symbol and its centripetal containments. This difference can only have a critical bearing upon transcendentalist notions of religious allegory and invalidates their putative semantic and moral equilibria.

It is essential to keep in mind, at the same time, that the allegorical dimension the way Benjamin understands it does not accord well with a conventionally understood dialecticity. Benjamin's description of the German baroque allegory emphasises its initial attachment to the mundane/secular world and its concentration on historical reality. However, the latter has eventually come to assume the form of a frozen, deadened *facies hippocratica* and be metamorphosed into a "petrified, primordial landscape."³ Allegory à la Benjamin freezes historical continuity, or, rather, it is the product of a reasoning that fails to grasp any essential historical linearity. There is no possibility here of affirming a dialectic of consciousness and history with clear demarcations of agency and experiential (historical) contents. Characteristically, what the above description of history as *facies hippocratica* deploys is the mechanism of prosopopoeia which comes to configure history as a *death's head*. Benjamin uses it in a way that anticipates Paul de Man's construals of this trope in terms of a defensive mechanism that integrally monitors its own failure at warding off

² Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen I* (Leipzig; Darmstadt, 1819), 118; cited in Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 165.
³ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 166.

finitude.⁴ Baudelaire extensively uses prosopopoeia and allegory. I will connect Paul de Man's understanding of both tropes with Benjamin's configuration of the latter (as shown in the *Trauerspiel* study and the *Arcades Project*) since both approaches offer potentially combinable insights into some of the realities thematised in Baudelaire's poetry: the petrification of organic and historical life, and the commodification of human interaction. As will become evident, however, my deployment of Benjamin's vocabulary is not unqualified.

One of the premises underlying the *Trauerspiel* study is that allegory can accommodate the fragmentation of linear history and the exacerbation of the socio-symbolic codes that are supposed to hold a society together. Equally important, the way Benjamin reads the German baroque allegory, and allegory in general, implies its capacity to serve as the trope-grid through which the poetic elaboration of signification procedures can be effected. Following the insights of Eugene Holland, Julia Kristeva, and Walter Benjamin I will enhance the thematic space that processes of meaning-production occupy in this poetry and the way they underlie the distinctive Baudelairean melancholia. Benjamin gave (Baudelaire's) melancholy its indelible historical index. I read in this melancholia the friction engendered by the uneasy cohabitation of intra-historical and supra-historical parameters and their corresponding provisos. The supra-historical dimension will be approached, initially, via the intricate mechanisms of memory that the poetry depends upon and works through. My aim will be to reveal the contradictions that underpin Benjamin's analyses when he historicises without accounting adequately for inner laws of development that

⁴ See Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press), 68-81.

language, memory, and literature obey. Primarily though, I will focus on the way the itinerary of memory aiming to sediment a sense of self and experience in the Baudelairean subject proves to be inherently abortive. The failure in question occurs not on account of methodological inconsistencies but because of the hollowing out of immanence that subtends, as much as gets instantiated in and through, that very trajectory. It will be argued that this voiding is the ineluctable effect of the semiotic character of the mnemonic labour. Inevitably, the above premise can only antagonise Benjamin's historicist determinism which, however, in its unorthodox inflections, will still serve not only as a starting point but as a perpetual point of reference.

Nietzsche overtly related the viability of historicism to the issue of memory and forgetfulness. He saw the former as the correlate of a hypertrophic archiving of event-data and their alignment into serial narratives. This storage process and the retrieval mechanisms that support it hamper human development. It is history understood as entelechic unfolding of spirit that is explicitly targeted here. However, as Nietzsche is quick to add, "God's vicissitudes on earth" is a risible version of what really constitutes human history, that is, the breach with determinism, the open-endedness of human conflict.⁵ The contents of historical agon, according to Nietzsche, should not be preempted through the imposition of historical meaning in *monumental* historiography and its concomitant memory. They should be the objects of perpetual negotiations the same way forgetfulness should infiltrate vigilant memory. The capacity to live *unhistorically* accrues to the ability to forget that

⁵ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 104.

is so necessary to the functioning of a healthy organism. "There is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture."⁶ Baudelaire has addressed the need to forget in the midst of a hysterical archiving of constitutively elusive or unclaimed experiences. He has also linked it to turning one's back on history in order to be able to lead a (historical) existence at all. What ensues is not the dwarfing of historical sense subtending most mystificatory transcendentalisms but the probing into the very enabling conditions of historical understanding. "Le Cygne" engages the virtual and episodic memory that accompanies a sense of history perforated by simulacral presences on the borderline between phantasm and event. The poetry takes the linear storage of experience-turned-*souvenir* into task and leverages instead the possibility of doing justice to a notion of the event "beyond the general and the particular, the collective and the private."⁷ It refuses to dumb down history into an aggregate of essence coordinates or wall it off in the face of finitude and "communicating singularities".⁸ All these anxieties permeate it and inflect it towards the belabouring of essence-devoid subjectivity and a notion of history that is not adversary to Nietzschean aleatoriness and non-sublatable difference. They underlie my analyses and serve as an unappeasable reminder of the zones that Benjamin's eccentrically historicising enterprise attempted to account for.

⁶ Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 62.

⁷ See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), 148.

⁸ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 150.

Dialecticity, Mediation, Allegory

The dialectical image is one flashing up momentarily. It is thus, as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability, that the past, in this case that of Baudelaire, can be captured. The redemption which can be carried out in this way and in no other is always only to be won out of the perception of that which is being lost irretrievably.

Benjamin, "Central Park"

In Christine Buci-Glucksmann's words, "allegory is anti-dialectical or, to use Benjamin's terms, ... it is *dialectic at a standstill*, frozen, fixed in images."⁹ Historical/societal mediation is not regarded by Benjamin to be endemic in the allegorical matrices, which, I believe, paradoxically renders them proximate to symbolic immediacy. Temporality is inherently linked with representation in the *Origin of German Tragic Drama* whereas allegory is pertinent to the extent that it serves a broader problematics of the possibility and implications of representationality. The "decisive category of time"¹⁰ is acknowledged throughout by Benjamin whereas its introduction into the field of semiotics is heralded by him as the "great romantic achievement." However, in this case, as in the case of Paul de Man and his treating the temporal dimension as allegory's constitutive condition, what is evinced throughout is a configuration that is at odds with a chronological, linear, cumulative, or even *durée*-like chronicity. De Man insists on the irreducible anteriority and randomness of the preceding sign triggering the allegorical trajectory, whereas Benjamin counterposes *Jetztzeit*, a temporality of genuine presentness (and thus radical, non-dialecticised difference) as being compatible with allegory. His is a construal that makes sense in the

⁹ Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 103.

¹⁰ Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 166.

framework of an endangerment of the mnemonic solidarity with the past and reflects a crisis-oriented rationale. That this endangerment cannot be confronted with a voluntary, linear memory is one of his primary assumptions. The political dimension that underlies Benjamin's understanding of allegory and temporality mandates the historically adequate remembrance of all those not sanctioned by normative historiography, the historically repressed *Namenlose*. It is the latter that Benjamin will come to recognise in Baudelaire's characters, in all the underprivileged haunting Baudelaire's poetry that have been trampled by the progressivist historicism of the ruling classes. Baudelaire's mnemonic alertness beneath the surface aestheticism will attract him to the poet. The flash-back ruptures of mnemonic continua that poems such as "Le Cygne" exhibit partake of the Benjaminian ecstatic destructive-redemptive encounters with past life and experience. "To the empty linear time of the cumulative succession of events, Benjamin opposes the necessity of a temporal break, an interruption in time disclosed by the imaginaries of history."¹¹ It is the belabouring of equally irreversible temporal breaks that I discern in several of Baudelaire's poems (in "Le Cygne" for example) and thus deploy Benjamin's insights into the radical incommensurability of past and present in a qualified form. Benjamin coupled his notion of the monadic present with a demand for the rehabilitation of the victims of past injustice and violence. This way he substantially modified the implied disjunctiveness of past and present that can be inferred from the non-dialectical relation of the events that are infused with the Now-Time. "A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a

¹¹ Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason*, 44.

transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history.... [H]istorical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past."¹² I find the simultaneous accommodation of a non-transitory present *moment* that "blast[s] open the continuum of history" and the simultaneous affirmation of a trajectory within which the past can be recognised problematic. However, the aporia at the core of Benjamin's schema concerns the stunning possibility of unshackling ourselves from the illusion of recognising the past 'the way it was' while salvaging a modicum of historical memory requisite to future-oriented praxis and to the redress of past injustice: "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of *a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger*."¹³ The construal of historical memory within a frame of trauma/danger impacts any notion of a horizontal recapitulation of history's contents, and concerns Baudelaire's poetry directly.¹⁴

Benjamin envisages a condensation of the temporal dimension and a concretion of time that emanates from the present.¹⁵ That this concretion is one of literary modernity's recurrent preoccupations hardly needs emphasising. One of the modes in which it has been poetically instantiated is Baudelaire's perforation of *idéal* by *spleen*. Temporality in the latter is perceived as a threat dissolving the

¹² Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992), 254.

¹³ Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 247; emphasis added.

¹⁴ Cf.: "The dialectical image is one flashing up momentarily" (Benjamin, "Central Park," 49).

¹⁵ See "The Image of Proust," in *Illuminations*, 206-7: "The eternity which Proust opens to view is convoluted time, not boundless time.... Proust has brought off the tremendous feat of letting the whole world age by a lifetime in an instant." Also, "Baudelaire's work ... has assembled the days of remembrance into a spiritual year" (Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn [London and New York: Verso, 1997], 142).

textual characters' present, whereas in the former the defensive *correspondances* are mobilised in order to sediment a sense of present in the face of a perpetual temporal menace. There is affinity, therefore, between Benjamin's conception of a radical presentness that can still accommodate solidarity with the past and Baudelaire's enhancement of the singularity of the present, ambivalences and/or idiosyncratic differences notwithstanding. In both Benjamin and Baudelaire I encounter a present-oriented rationale. Both engage in a critique of dialectical linearism and historicist progressivism expressed by means of allegory in the case of the poet and through emphasis on allegory's historical susceptibilities in the case of the theorist.¹⁶ Both, also, engage models of memory in relation to one's capacity to retrieve experiential contents.

I consider the non-cumulative temporality advocated by Benjamin to be anticipative of de Man's temporality of sheer anteriority and randomness –minus the messianic dimension, though. The theological parameter in Benjamin is an issue that constitutes an agenda of its own, and has been responsible for a constant uneasiness over the possible infiltration of Benjamin's critical project by a salvational metaphysics. The cathexis on epiphanic moments that usually characterises the latter seems to accord disturbingly well with the interrogation of linear temporal economies. However, one must refrain from surmising that Benjamin's agenda was nothing but the inflection of a certain messianic theology to a critical mode admmissive of the political dimension and attuned to pressing historical exigencies. I can only deposit my concern with regard to the dual

¹⁶ See Benjamin, "Konvolut J: Baudelaire," in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 337: "The correspondence between antiquity and modernity is the sole constructive conception of history in Baudelaire. With its rigid armature, it excludes any dialectical conception."

nature of Benjamin's rationale here. It would be excessive to attempt the containment of this case within the perimeters of the present project especially in view of the fact that it complicates the boundaries of the mystical/secular divide upon which an interrogation would have to depend.

Returning to baroque allegory and Benjamin's construals of the temporal dimension, and as regards the lack of inter-mediation of part and whole in the case of an allegorical arrangement of contents, if, as de Man claims, "in the world of allegory, time is the originary constitutive category," then the temporal itinerary in question must be non-accretive, non-finalist, and therefore compatible with an allegorical concentration on the non-intentional elements of reality, elements not reducible to personological agency (and encountered in abundance in Baudelaire's poetry).¹⁷ Neither Benjamin nor de Man understand allegory with its concomitant temporality in terms of a mutuality of communicating contents serially or dialectically stringing out that can ultimately be subsumed under an overarching concept. Buci-Glucksmann eloquently formulates what she characterises as an *Umweg* [roundabout] methodology underlying Benjamin's project. This methodology is congruent with Paul de Man's attack on both historicism and the egological certainties infusing all varieties of psychologisms –New Critical or not. She writes,

This *Umweg*, while absorbing Husserl's critique of all historicism or psychologism and the neo-Kantian rejection of philosophy as a closed system of truth, remains no less distinct from the major philosophical positions of the epoch. Insofar as the object exists only in a fragmentary state as a non-intentional but signifying element, interpretative truth can result neither from an intentional historical phenomenology that recaptures

¹⁷ See Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason*, 66. She writes: "If all allegory shies away from *Weltanschauung* and focuses micrologically on the detail or the fragment –the non-intentional elements of reality as opposed to a whole that is always problematic– the philosophical method of allegory can only be the indirect one of the *Umweg*." The fragment in this case is close to Benjamin's Leibnizian monads, random yet encapsulating the essence of reality.

sedimented primal levels, nor *a fortiori* from lived experience in the sense of Dilthey's *Erlebnis*.¹⁸

Benjamin and de Man's maximisation of the potential of allegory to account for the alteration of the modern conceptual horizon helps grasp the thematic and rhetorical essentials of Baudelaire's poetry. Moreover, their configuration of the trope can take into account both the historical determinants of the artistic product and the rhetorical specificities of a poetry that exhibits its dual awareness of its conjunctural, historical character and its deployment of it as an excuse for the elaboration of intra-linguistic concerns. History, temporality, memory, and awareness of the inner laws of language interweave in poetic works that do not hesitate to use historical façades and linear modes of narrative in order to elaborate allegorically on language's intricate mechanisms, and contribute to its internal historicity. One of the foundational assumptions of this thesis, therefore, is that the understanding of one's historical reality and the acknowledgement of the autonomy of the discursive domain are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The former, of course, is not adhered to here in terms of the linear accumulation of semantically appropriated and empirically verifiable events. Nor is the latter understood in purely aestheticist terms, that is, as a self-referential realm totally abstracted from social experience. A historical understanding that fails to account for the specificities of language is totally inadequate to its own referents. One cannot quarrel with history *as such*, but with an understanding of it that reduces it

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Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason*, 66.

to a compendium of structural determinisms and/or primal intentionalities.¹⁹ The tension between the two conceptual frameworks in question cannot be resolved in terms of a dialectical synthesis. Not only is it partially constitutive of their own specificity but also the historical subordination of discourse to the pragmatic realm of communication and power deployment precludes a less assertive affirmation of language's genuine force within poetic modernity. What is of primary concern here is that Baudelaire's poetry addresses the mutual undermining of language and essence, and legitimates a reading that discerns the antagonism between the two spheres' fundaments. One of the platforms upon which this address is instantiated is that of a sexuality that is unhinged from any essentialist anchoring.

¹⁹ In Baudelaire's poetry egological intentionality is continually put into abeyance. The blasting apart of historical and temporal continua that the poetry accommodates in the form of flash-back mnemonic interpolations and their shedding a disturbing light upon any conferral of significance based on immutable semantic constants, is syntonetic with the critical-historical nature of Baudelairean imagery. Benjamin's understanding of the truly historical, non-intentional, non-phenomenological images is particularly relevant: "[T]hey attain to legibility only at a particular time Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each 'now' is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time. (This point of explosion ... is the death of *intentio*, which thus coincides with the birth of authentic historical time, the time of truth)" (Benjamin, "Konvolut N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," in *The Arcades Project*, 463).

CHAPTER TWO

SEXUAL EXPERIENCE AND THE METAMORPHOSES OF PERCEPTIONAL GIVENS: *LES ÉPAVES*

The non-reciprocating gaze

The sexual act in Baudelaire acquires its particular significance in the context of the always-imminent encroachment of asymbolia which is not simply the outcome of the collapse of consciousness entailed by the inherent impact of the orgasmic moment. I argue that Baudelairean sexuality accommodates a dimension of physical materiality that resists its transcendence into the realm where drives and/or socio-symbolic imperatives are inscribed. One of the traits this materiality translates into is a gaze that does not acknowledge the human specificity of the other. The dissolution of the reciprocal gaze that most poems in *Les Épaves* [*Flotsam*] implicitly negotiate impacts the subject's capacity to have his desire recognised and socially mediated. Ocular complementarity implicates the eroticised subjects in a specular symmetry of mutually recognisable subjectivities. The parties concerned are expected to respond to each other's ocular call. In this case, the opposite holds true. The non-reciprocity of the gaze is an explicit given of the poetry, and a factor seriously contributive to an overall erotic and auratic loss. The textual narrators covet the female body while construing it in terms of reification of the organic life within. It is within this construal that the rift between perception and cognition materialises. The narrators' gaze reifies the female other, objectifies her, and aims to act out the recognition of self that the staring protagonist seeks while at the same time retaining the distance that is requisite to the preservation of aura. The eyes in

question have lost the ability to reciprocate a gaze of recognition.¹ In Benjamin's words, "sexus [has] detached itself from eros."² This loss and detachment, however, are not passively accepted. Baudelaire registers the clash of interests that underlies a mode of conceiving the other in terms that acknowledge her specificity and the obliteration of any trace of individuality turning the female presence into a corporeal terrain where imagination can exercise its rights, intelligence can project its phobias, and consciousness can reaffirm sovereignty.

In the following poem, "À celle qui est trop gaie [To Her Who is too Gay]," from the section *Les Épaves* [*Flotsam*], the preservation of erotic aura is staked upon the salvaging of a minimal ceremonial distance. This is supposed to transpire through the transformation of the female body into a somatic *ciaroscuro* landscape. In a stunning reversal of established values, however, the qualities of this natural realm are presented as inimical to the speaker, who ultimately voices his hatred of nature as much as his admission of it as a category constitutive of his perception of the other. From the initial conception of the woman in natural terms,

Ta tête, ton geste, ton air
Sont beaux comme un beau paysage;
Le rire joue en ton visage
Comme un vent frais dans un ciel clair.

Your head, your gestures, and bearing
Are as lovely as a beautiful landscape;
Laughter plays over your face
Like a cool wind in a clear sky.

¹ See Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 149: "The expectation aroused by the look of the human eye is not fulfilled. Baudelaire described eyes of which one is inclined to say that they have lost the ability to look."

² Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 148.

one passes to repulsion towards nature, and aggressivity towards the woman who is a carrier of its qualities.

Pour châtier ta chair joyeuse,
Pour meurtrir ton sein pardonné,
Et faire à ton flanc étonné
Une blessure large et creuse,³

So as to chastise your happy flesh,
To bruise your pardoned breast,
And cleave into your astounded side
A wide deep wound

The chastisement in question reflects a sadomasochistic logic which is present throughout Baudelaire's work, sadomasochism being primarily an issue of mediation and objectification of self and other. Punishing the other amounts empathetically in this poetry to punishing oneself.

The motif of the aborted gaze is clearer in "Les Bijoux": "Les yeux fixés sur moi, comme un tigre dompté, / D'un air vague et rêveur elle essayait des poses, / Et la candeur unie à la lubricité / Donnait un charme neuf à ses métamorphoses; [Her eyes fixed on me, like a tame tigress, / With a vague and dreamy look striking various poses, / And candour together with wantonness / Gave a novel charm to her metamorphoses;]" (OC I: 158). It is a unity based on antitheses that prevails here: "eyes fixed" yet with a "dreamy and vague look," "candour" and "wantonness," continuous "metamorphoses." The fixed eyes do not denote an identity-acknowledging gaze, but bear the qualities of a senseless beast (a tigress) whose appeal to humans emanates from its threatening nature,

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OC I: 156/CV: 279-80; translation Francis Scarfe's.

self-sufficiency, and behavioural intransitivity.⁴ The motif of the woman as lurking and self-transforming presence serves as the organising principle. The look emanates from a source that does not hail the other's specificity. The narrator's excitation rises in proportion to the specular mutability of the woman: "Je croyais voir^{unis}/par un nouveau dessin / Les hanches de l'Antiope au buste d'un imberbe [I thought I saw by virtue of a transformation / The hips of Antiope and a stripling's *bust*]." The French "bust" translates as either "bosom, chest" or, most significantly, "sculpture (depicting the upper part of one's body)." In the latter case, one witnesses the passage from nature to the reification of the human implied in the monumentality of sculpture, a persistent theme throughout this poetry. Baudelaire tries to defend the aura and remoteness of the given (*ergo* the beastly, intransitive quality of the woman) against the encroachment of volitional and distance-reducing gaze. Yet, his enterprise leads to the mortification of the physical dimension, to the gradual reification of the human body. Nature turns to funereal monument repeatedly in his work, and through the concrete reality of his dialectical images.

Corporeal materiality and reification

The sexual economy regulating the narrativial subjects' interaction is a pointer to the wider retreat of one's capacity to absorb and process experience. The transformation of the female body into a space of contention where the physical and mental capacities of the narrator(s) are put to the test testifies to this retreat. The characters' bodies serve as the vessel wherein sexuality undermines

⁴ See Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 150: "The deeper the remoteness which a glance has to overcome, the stronger will be the spell that is apt to emanate from the gaze."

identity instead of serving as a channel wherein the subject's truth can be consolidated. The distress over sexual orientation and fulfilment experienced by the Baudelairean subjects symptomises an incisive disarray of identity layers that fail to coalesce into unassailable subjectivity. Baudelaire's sexed-up characters exude a crossover appeal. A subversive aversion to the feminine realm coupled with the encoding of postcoital melancholia into virtually every character's social gestures overwhelms any expectation of psychosexual equilibrium. Baudelaire manages to feed an amazing amount of coded behaviour, decoy manoeuvres, and sexual innuendo into his character profiles. Visible alienation effects accompany the hectic erotic allure of his characters and counterbalance a pervasive sense of sexual entitlement partially responsible for their unsettling aura.⁵

Baudelaire's sexual lingua franca is replete with instances of frustrated gratification, a condition that is not mere deviation but immanently inscribed. The texts are full of attempts of lovers manqué to attain some form of fulfilment, sometimes via recourse to empathetic memory. All they end up with is consumption of sex devoid of any lining up of the cores of sexual experience into univalent sexuality. The "mannequin puissant" has already turned into "débris de squelette"⁶ by the time the narrator struggles to distil some form of meaning from the experience he has had. The subject leases himself out as a psychotic grappling with the metamorphoses of perceptual givens. The fluidity of perception in this case marks the overwhelming of conceptual equilibrium due to the non-commensurability of the perceived scenes with meaning-imbuing cognitive and

⁵ All these observations, however, should not be read as part of a normalising reading detecting pathologies in this imbalance of drives and discourses.

⁶ See "Les Métamorphoses du vampire," OC I: 159.

moral frameworks. "Les Métamorphoses du vampire" literalises the inundation of perception by a specular mobility that deprives the seeing subject from any cognitive anchoring. Again, the Baudelairean topos of the woman/beast turning into soulless reified object (skeleton in this case) via the path of waning naturality offers a profound comment on the inherently reified character of all erotic and, by extension, conceptual experience.

LES MÉTAMORPHOSES DU VAMPIRE

La femme cependant, de sa bouche de fraise,
En se tordant ainsi qu'un *serpent* sur la braise,
Et *pétrissant* ses seins sur le fer de son busk,
Laissait couler *les* mots tout imprégnés de musk;
.....

"Je remplace
La lune, le soleil, le ciel et les étoiles!
.....

.....je ne vis plus
Qu'une outre aux flancs gluants, toute pleins de pus!
Je fermai les deux yeux, dans ma froide épouvante,
Et quand je les rouvris à la clarté vivante,
À mes côtés, au lieu du *mannequin puissant*
Qui semblait avoir fait provision de sang,
Tremblaient confusément des *débris de squelette*,
Qui d'eux-mêmes rendaient le cri d'une girouette
Ou d'une enseigne, au bout d'une tringle de fer,
Que balance le vent pendant les nuits d'hiver.⁷

THE METAMORPHOSES OF THE VAMPIRE

Meanwhile the woman, uttered these words
From her strawberry mouth, writhing like a snake
On a brazier, and chafing her breasts on the steel of her corset,
Musk-penetrated words:
.....
"I will replace
The moon, the sun, the sky and the stars!

⁷ OC I: 159; emphasis added.

.....

.....I saw but
 A slimy gourd dripping with pus!
 I closed my eyes in a fit of horror,
 And when I reopened them to the strong light,
 I found next to me, instead of the powerful *mannequin*
 Which had satiated herself with blood,
 The rattling bones of a *skeleton*,

Rasping like a weathercock
 Or a sign-board dangling from its iron frame,
 Which the wind swings on a winter night.

The passage from "serpent" to "skeleton" via the intermediate "mannequin puissant" translates the teasing out of the true substance of the female partner through successive layers of repugnant naturality. The condition that is revealed underneath these layers is not deviational, but typical and exemplary. The natural stratum covers up the emblem-corpse in an attempt to prolong the defensive motion of understanding. The corpse as a model of erotic partner strikes at the core of an ahistorical phenomenon. The meaningless yet allegorical body points to reification as the transition from natural given to the concept, the diremption of physis into petrified fragment. The mortification of the material dimension inherent in the formation of concept undercuts any attempt to transcribe the Baudelairean mortification of the human body in *exclusively* historicist terms as the effect of the market commodification of the human body.⁸ This does not mean, however, that there are no distinct historical responses to it. Baroque

⁸ See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone Press, 1997), 281: "One of the models of art may be the corpse in its transfigured and imperishable form." The reification of the deceased dating back to primordial times lies behind aesthetic duration, according to this hypothesis. The historical forms that this reification assumes, from mummification to preservation in verbal signification, translate a society's broader self-understanding.

allegory is most relevant here since it was deployed in order to grapple with the meaning of this transformation. Baudelaire differs from his baroque predecessors, however, in that he resisted the ultimate salvational leap into transcendentalism that they undertook.⁹

In general, the non-integration of sexual experience within sexuality-stabilising cognitive-moral ensembles that the above poem engages is symptomatic of the broader withering of experiential certainties. One can hardly speak of an experience in the proper sense of the word here. T. S. Eliot's Prufrockian characters are equally paradigmatic of this withering. What sets them apart is the tone of resignation that shows through them. The sexual act is the melancholic act *par excellence* in Baudelaire. This somatic fragmentation and specular fluidity vis-à-vis the female body are indissoluble from a problematisation of representation. I contend that they ensue on, and allegorically corroborate, the diffraction of the substantial unity and homogeneity of the represented field, which unity is indispensable for stable representation.

The enhanced awareness of the material dimension of reality gives exhibited in Baudelaire's poetry, with the human body being the predominant paradigm, responds to the texts' engagement with the contingent character of all positive and ideal contents. The *montage* of isolated and often petrified human fragments, of the parts of the female anatomy that the narrators zoom in on as if in seeming oblivion to the whole person, points to a hollowing of human nature that is not, however, mourned for. "Une Martyre," with its Delacroix^e-sque dissection

⁹ This leap and Baudelaire's resistance to metaphysical transcendentalism are treated in the "Allegorical melancholia, temporality and correspondences" section in chapter eight below, 178-90.

of an eroticised even if bartered body, exhibits the uncanny attribution of flesh-like qualities to the woman's accessories while her mutilated body is void of any vestige of corporeality: "Un bas rosâtre, orné de coins d'or, à la jambe, / Comme un souvenir est resté; / La jarretière, ainsi qu'un oeil secret qui flambe, / Darde un regard diamanté [A flesh-coloured stocking, adored with gold clocks, / rests on her leg like a memory; / Her garters, just like a secret eye that glints, / Give off a gemlike glare]" (OC I: 112). The corpse-like qualities of the female body inscribe reification and materiality within the core of putative fertility. The whole picture is accentuated in counterpoint to the poetry's self-understanding in dialogical, conjunctural terms. However, it is the contiguity of two facets of bodily reification that are evident: reification as both the outcome of a concrete historical arrangement of forces, and the permeation of history and memory by the materiality of semiotic inscriptions, whether they be understood as language or as pure sense-less physicality.

Baudelaire's insistence on the nonsensical materiality of the *constitutively* reified human body bears down upon the possibility of capturing the human dimension in terms of underlying essence fundamentals. Also, his avoidance of a lexicon of unconscious-begotten forces allows reading into his work a most promising resistance to rendering desire answerable to transcendent laws in the service of psychogenetic immanence or the cultural/political imperatives of the social field.¹⁰ The suffering of the Baudelairean characters does not consist in the

¹⁰ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane, pref. Michel Foucault (London: Athlone Press, 1984), 74. They write: "Castration and oedipalisation beget a basic illusion that makes us believe that real desire-production is answerable to higher formations that integrate it, subject it to transcendent laws, and make it serve a higher social and cultural production; there then appears a

frustration of their efforts to access the true nature or referent of their desire that can be glimpsed negatively through the veil of repression.¹¹ The poetry teases out the socially asymmetrical formations of desire, and enhances this asymmetry as the cause of this suffering's genesis. The social twist given to desire, however, never coagulates into a transcendentalism of meaning exclusively guaranteed by social forces. The voiding of naturality within sexuality and the melancholia it triggers point to the infiltration of human sexuality by a material, semiotic logic. The female body is gradually divested of its symbolic, natural qualities only to transform into a sense-void sign whose signified is the trace left behind by the disappearance of its meaning. The disintegration of subjectivity that the internal colonisation of desire by sense-less materiality solicits radicalises psychogenesis to such an extent that the extraction of homocentric contents turns into fictional pursuit. This radicalisation precludes the smooth internalisation of man by/into man via the bridge of sexual and/or linguistic communication.

I use the term "semiotic" also in the Kristevan sense of the pre-symbolic arrangement of the somatic forces before they are invested in signification.¹²

kind of 'unsticking' of the social field with regard to the production of desire, in whose name all resignations are justified in advance."

¹¹ See Ian Buchanan, *Deleuzism: A Metacommentary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 20. He writes: "Prohibitions are calculations ... and we are deceived if we act as though the true nature of what they proscribe can be read directly from what is specifically banned."

¹² See Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 39, 41, 42, 65, 66. It is essential to clarify that the "primal object" behind mourning and melancholia the loss of which is negated in and through language and the passage from semiosis to signification, the "ultimate cause of conveyability, exists only for and through discourse and the already constituted subject.... Positing the existence of that other language [the semiotic in this case] and even of an other of language, indeed of an outside-of-language, is not necessarily setting up a preserve for metaphysics or theology. The postulate corresponds to a psychic requirement that Western metaphysics and theory have had, perhaps, the good luck and audacity to represent. *That psychic requirement is certainly not universal*; Chinese civilization, for instance, is not a civilization of the conveyability of the thing in itself; it is rather one of sign repetition and variation, that is to say, of transcription" (66-7; emphasis added).

Semiotic processes include “displacement, condensation, alliterations, vocal and gestural rhythms.”¹³ The semiotic chora finds a subtle echo in Baudelaire’s cadaverisation of the human body and his narrators’ witnessing of the female partner’s autarky and intransitivity in terms that point to another economy of female *jouissance* beyond the competition with the male partner’s symbolic power. Baudelaire’s female presences resist interpretative assimilation to the extent that they point to a wholly different economy of desire. The woman-turned-skeleton is not simply the bodily surface whereupon the historical conjuncture has inscribed its parcelling and prostituting commodification of the human dimension, but also the realm wherein “the feminine interior (meaning the psychic space and, at the level of the bodily experience, the vagina-anus combination) can then cease being the crypt that enclosed the dead woman and conditions frigidity.”¹⁴ The tense dialectic of corporeal opulence and somatic emaciation in Baudelaire’s poetry obeys the necessity to hollow out any notion of inwardness wherein fundamentals of essence can be ingrained.¹⁵ The female corpse-emblem, additionally, is an effect of the abject dimension that inheres in

¹³ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 65.

¹⁴ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 79.

¹⁵ I am fully aware of the potentially self-undermining aspects of Kristeva’s agenda. The semiotic chora must necessarily be approached within the broader terrain that the symbolic, the Law, demarcates. The latter is not only prohibitive, but also generative. See Judith Butler’s cogent critique of a latent essentialism underlying Kristeva’s schemas in “The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva,” in *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva’s Writing*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), 164-78: “The female body that is freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive, but operating in the service of that law’s self-amplification and proliferation” (178). Kristevian *signifiance* has not addressed the possibility that the semiotic and the symbolic are not ontologically disjunct. I find the transgression of the symbolic by the semiotic particularly relevant to *rephrasing* the constitutive crisis of reason and evidentiality that I engage in the examined texts, but always within the framework Foucault demarcated when he criticised sex as a causal principle. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 154. For a more comprehensive appraisal of Kristeva’s project and its relevance to a transgressive politics see Suzanne Guerlac, “Transgression

Baudelaire's poetry. The corpse that is revealed underneath layers of covering flesh as the deepest truth of the other "signifies the supervallence of the body, the body's recalcitrance to consciousness, reason or will."¹⁶ The corpse signifies the excess of sensuous physicality vis-à-vis cognition and reference.

Baudelaire's radicalisation of the reified character of human experience and sexuality and his allegorical belabouring of it are not, however, impenetrable to the dimension of the social production of individuals and desire. I regard Eugene Holland's writings on Baudelaire as a promising entrée into the possibility of combining historical responsiveness with a perspective that acknowledges the fragile contingency of reason upon semiotic underpinnings.¹⁷ Baudelaire's poetry configures sexuality not in terms of an infrastructure¹⁸ but as a behavioural ensemble that shapes up in the crossroads between social injunctions and the collapse of vaulting cognitive and moral frameworks that necessarily brackets the former. On the oversexed yet stiff Baudelairean body one can read the inscription of socio-moral imperatives. Beyond that, however, this body exhibits an uncanny materiality that does not simply translate the reifying parcelling imposed by market conditions, but also the material dimension of human experience and

in Theory: Genius and the Subject of *La Révolution du langage poétique*," in *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, 238-57.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Gross, "The Body of Signification," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: the Work of Julia Kristeva*, ed. John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 92.

¹⁷ See Eugene Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis: the sociopoetics of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ See Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 101: "We do not believe in general that sexuality has the role of an infrastructure in the assemblages of desire, nor that it constitutes an energy capable of transformation or of neutralization and sublimation. Sexuality can only be thought as one flux among others, entering into conjunction with other fluxes But psychoanalysis has produced everything --except exits."

sexuality that cannot be transcended into an organon of sense, instinctual drives, or instrumental reason.

Baudelaire refused to dumb down the societal dimensions of sexual and social privation and chronicled the intertwining of lack-qua-desire and its social fabrication. In the corporeality of his images and the unsettling physicality of his characters he gives off the notion that history is inscribed on the human body not only in the form of socially imposed drills but also in the way individuals relate to themselves, to their physicality, to their desire.¹⁹ Deleuze is absolutely right to affirm that "signifiante and the signifier enjoy no privilege."²⁰ Holland's work testifies to the possibility of conjugating a Lacanian problematics of desire with a Deleuzian concern over the inundation of desire by societal apparatuses.²¹

The voiding of naturality and its expansion beyond the space of prostitution constitutes one of the primary axes of Baudelaire's engagement with the body and sexuality. The non-conjunctural dimensions of reification are equally pressing and are inserted by Baudelaire within the deeper layers of human sexuality where they are seen to subtend the passage from perceived scene to

¹⁹ See Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 112: "History is constantly being remade, but conversely it is constantly being made by each of us, on his own body." Lacan's admission of the linguistic parameter as formative of desire and the subject in distinction to notions of genetic and immanent psychogenesis, also, does not potentially preclude the effects of collectives on humans. His contention that "what we are faced with ... is the increasing absence of all those saturations of the superego and ego ideal that are realised in all kinds of organic forms in traditional societies, forms that extend from the rituals of everyday intimacy to the periodical festivals in which the community manifests itself" reads like Benjamin. See Lacan, "Aggressivity in psychoanalysis," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1989), 26.

²⁰ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 113. He continues by saying that "we should simultaneously study all the regimes of pure signs, from the point of view of the abstract machines they put into play, and also all the concrete assemblages, from the point of view of the mixtures they carry out. *A concrete semiotics is a mix, a mixture of several regimes of signs*" (emphasis added).

²¹ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 271: "To overturn the theatre of representation into the order of desiring-production: this is the whole task of schizoanalysis." Holland has explicitly aligned himself with this task.

concept. I argue that this voiding of naturality, which the metamorphosis of the female body into senseless skeleton comes to translate, responds to concerns that are subsumed under a broader problematics of subjectivity. This fact necessitates an eclectic exploration of philosophical and methodological threads that will be seen to subtend Baudelaire's work and thus show it to harmonise with a broader address of the question of the subject. This question was asked in a mode pertinent to the examined poetry within the confines of German Romantic thought. The following chapter aims to look into the latter's vocabulary and use it as an echoing chamber within which to enhance the Baudelairean inflections of subjectivity and voiding of experience.

CHAPTER THREE

BAUDELAIRE'S INTERSTITIAL SUBJECTIVITIES: THE SUBJECT AND WORK

And the massive truth flung back at us is that we have not left the era of the Subject.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*

Baudelaire and Romantic subjectivity: a selective genealogy of concerns

The following section embeds Baudelaire's thinking apropos of the theme that underlies my analyses, i.e., the poetic elaboration of modern subjectivity in distinction to essentialist construals of human experience and praxis, within a broader conceptual vista. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy have put forward a pertinent claim: "We still belong to the era it [Romanticism] opened up. The present period continues to deny precisely this belonging, which defines us (despite the inevitable divergence introduced by repetition)."¹ Their assertion acquires particular inflections in the context of exploring the vicissitudes of modern subjectivity, and in the framework of the analysis of the character that the latter has assumed in the case of the consensually archetypal poet of Modernism.² What concerns me at this stage is the way in which Baudelaire's project is

¹ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 15. T. S. Eliot's disparagement of Romanticism is a characteristic instance of this denial.

² With reference to German and French Romanticism and French Symbolism, the impact of the work done by critics such as Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, among others, as well as that of the more phenomenologically-oriented criticism of Georges Poulet, Jean-Pierre Richard, and Jean Starobinski before them, cannot be overemphasised. See indicatively George Poulet, *Les métamorphoses du cercle*, preface by Jean Starobinski (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); Jean Starobinski, *La mélancolie au miroir: trois lectures de Baudelaire* (Paris: Julliard, 1989). Pioneering studies such as those of Jean Pommier, *Dans les chemins de Baudelaire* (Paris: J. Corti, 1945); Georges Blin, *Le sadisme de Baudelaire* (Paris: J. Corti, 1948); Eugène Crépet, *Baudelaire* (Paris: A. Messein, 1928), among others, opened the way for a close-up on Baudelaire that would move beyond psycho-biographical sensationalism. Walter Benjamin's work on Baudelaire, however, set completely different standards in its rigorous interlocking of historical and aesthetic concerns.

impregnated by radical inflections of finitude and subjectivity that resonate with (German) Romantic concerns.³

In Baudelaire one can locate a poetico-critical practice that resists the “empiricism of a psychology of aesthetic faculties”⁴ in contradistinction to a long tradition seeing in Baudelaire the poet-aesthete *par excellence*. Nowhere is the “postulate of consciousness as the source of ... creativity”⁵ predicated by Baudelaire as such, at least unaccompanied by the bracketing of triumphant geniality which partially springs from a socio-political and aesthetic awareness of the conditions determining the practice of poetry, his own including. This critique is also derived from a more or less conscious distancing of the poet from the clichés of a hyper-imagination mediating the vision of the transcendental order through the symbolic image and the organismic metaphor (*vide* correspondences and their ultimate insemination with a destabilising mnemonic aleatoriness). His allegorical predisposition testifies to his distancing from symbolic dialecticity.

Baudelaire inscribed his poetic praxis within the conceptual sphere of Romanticism while at the same time undermining the ontology of genius. This way he voided the notion of a genial subjectivity that could allegedly exercise authorial control over the discursive realm, embedded this awareness in his corpus, gave in to the necessity of erecting his discourse in the mode of lyricism, yet ultimately exposed this necessity as a generic decoy and referential ruse. He

³ See *The Literary Absolute*, 15.

⁴ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 103. The context is the way Schelling and Schlegel move beyond the anthropological foundations underlying the aestheticism of Wolff and Baumgarten and at the same time beyond a philosophy of the *cogito*.

⁵ Lilian R. Furst, *Counterparts: The dynamics of Franco-German literary relationships 1770-1895* (London: Methuen, 1977), 101.

bracketed the notion of authentic subjectivity through the dual strategy of exposing the social parameters to which the artistic product is accountable and engaging the void of immanence that lurks within every positional act, whether linguistic or historical. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy have abstracted several caveats that underlie the agenda of Jena Romanticism. They are relevant in the sense that they reveal the conceptual perspective within which Baudelaire's project can be subsumed:

Fundamentally, then, it is a matter of denouncing, with regard to the production of work (but also with regard to its appreciation, for they are inseparable), the anthropological decompositions or degradations of the *cogito* (be they of a "natural" or "supernatural" order). To recall a motif that we have more than simply alluded to, *it becomes necessary to restore to the Subject of subjectivity, beyond subjectivity, the creative and critical power of the work of art –of art as work*. And it is likewise necessary to remove this work from any and all exterior finality –whether it, in turn, be "natural" or "supernatural," of the order of pleasure or morality— in order to restore it, precisely, to the *operation* of such a Subject.⁶

This configuration of subjectivity without a self-transparent subject goes counter to what has traditionally collapsed to sovereign authorial imagination. The transsubjective nature of the artwork puts the stakes on the unfolding of imaginative faculties that can now be seen as "[shaping] what reposes in itself rather than arbitrarily concocting forms, details, fables, or whatever."⁷ The subject is constituted only in and through the work, and as such is not exhausted within egological attributes. The subject is formed in and through the realm demarcated by "the negativity specific to the transgression of the symbolic by the

⁶ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 104; emphasis added.
⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 283.

semiotic” [in Kristevian terminology] turning thus from *rejet* [the transgression of the unified phenomenological subject] into *le sujet en procès* [“the subject in process/on trial”].⁸ Together with the notion of *finality apart from an end*, the conceptual ground mentioned above informs part of the implicit inheritance upon which Baudelaire will refine a problematic of the self and the facticity of the artwork. This is an inheritance that has erroneously been construed in terms that emphasise the allegedly common denominator of essence underlying the faculty of imagination and the phenomenal capacity of the symbolic image to fill up the ontological void separating the realm of consciousness from that of objective reality.

The self-awareness that the examined texts exhibit concerning the intricate mechanisms of their own production is mirrored in their treating their own thematics as excuses for the belabouring of tensions and polarities innate to language. The mutual antagonism as much as illumination between constataion and performance, symbolicity and allegory, metaphoricity and random juxtaposition of semantic matrices and/or serial metonymy, is an integral part of Baudelaire’s story. This textual self-awareness, however, points to an economy of productive forces that exceeds the field of human intention and points to a necessity and an astonishment that transpire as and within language. This is the meaning of this poetry’s self-referentiality which should not be reduced to a thematic self-enclosure, stylistic intransitivity or recalcitrance to the social

⁸ See Suzanne Guerlac, “Transgression in Theory,” 242-3. The work where this notion of the subject as the retroactively constituted space wherein *signifiance* materialises is Julia Kristeva’s seminal *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 105. I find a certain compatibility between Lacoue-Labarthe’s notion of the Work-in-Progress with its correlative subject as the human form that this interminable process assumes, and Kristeva’s *sujet-en-procès*.

dimension. Baudelaire's text is transparent to what Lacoue-Labarthe construes as the self-productivity of the (German Romantic) literary work, in the sense that the geneses and vicissitudes of its forms are treated explicitly through being given allegorical and/or symbolic facets as much as through the mutual undermining of the two tropological modes.

A dialectical model accounting for the inter-constitution of form and content is too equilibrated for this poetry, even in the Adornian version.⁹ The fortunate mediation of form with content, their putative mutual immanence, works them up as the realm where universal notional fundamentals are still applicable. Baudelaire's thematic undercurrents highlight the fragile nature of this conceptual universality and align it with a positivism of contents that translates hegemonic moral and political imperatives. The entwining of form and content ineluctably involves the tracing back of the material/signifier to the notional/signified. The immediate result is the contraction of the void between the spheres in question into a traversible terrain of mutually recognisable essences. However, form never fully assumes the determinations of its own concept by turning into the latter's integral attribute, and it is this difference that Baudelaire articulates in the mode of a lyrical voice that portends its own demise. The poetry probes into the irreducible qualitative difference that imperils the dialectical relation of the two spheres, and renders the tension between them interminable.

⁹ See "Draft Introduction," in Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, esp. 332-359.

The mutual non-containment of nature and consciousness: "Obsession"

The examined poetry works on the immanent tension between conceptual transcendentalism and materiality (of both the linguistic register and what is referentially targeted). This tension is instantiated in the way history and temporality seem to be hollowing out each other in several of the poems ("Le Cygne" being an example) as much as in the intensification and final fragmentation of the materiality of both the physical realm and the metropolitan tableaux. This latter occurs in distinction to a gradual emphasis on the ethereal/immaterial dimension of the poetic image and the disincarnation of its intentionality. The poetry does not organise this distinction in the mode of a cumulative dialectic, however, which would entail the exit from the crisis that sustains its impetus. It integrates the affirmation of the ontological primacy of the natural object with the latter's infiltration by attributes that derive from the realm of abstraction, thus forcing it to submit to an irreversible denaturalisation. The following poem voices this infiltration which occurs in the mode of simultaneity.

OBSESSION

Grands bois, vous m'effrayez comme des cathédrales;
Vous hurlez comme l'orgue; et dans nos coeurs maudits,
Chambres d'éternel~~le~~ deuil où vibrent de vieux rôles,
Répondent les échos de vos *De profundis*.

Je te hais, Océan! tes bonds et tes tumultes,
Mon esprit les retrouve en lui; ce rire amer
De l'homme vaincu, plein de sanglots et d'insultes,
Je l'entends dans le rire énorme de la mer.

Comme tu me plairais, ô nuit! ^Sans ces étoiles
Dont la lumière parle un langage connu!
Car je cherche le vide, et le noir, et le nu!

Mais les ténèbres sont elles-mêmes des toiles
Où vivent, jaillissant de mon oeil par milliers,
Des êtres disparus aux regards familiers. (OC I: 75-6)

OBSESSION

Immense woods, you terrify me like cathedrals;
You roar like an organ; and in our accursed hearts,
Those chambers of eternal mourning where
Ancient death-moanings fill the air, the echoes of
Your *De Profundis* reverberate in the space.

I hate you, Ocean! Your waves and agitation
Fill up my own mind; this bitter laughter
Of the vanquished man, replete with sobs and blasphemy,
I hear it in the enormous grin of the sea.

How you would please me, O Night! Without these stars
Whose light speaks a language known!
Because I search for the void, the black, and the bare!

But the shadows themselves are canvases
Where live, leaping by the thousand in front of my eyes,
Beings long vanished in their familiar gaze.

“Obsession” integrates the inter-penetration of natural object and human consciousness in a way that deprives both of their ontological self-sufficiency. At the same time, the voiding of the natural dimension spills over into the imaginative faculty whose capacity to exist independently of the extrinsic world seems initially to be affirmed. Human consciousness is ultimately seen to ^bdepleted of the plenitude of content, or rather to desire this voiding: “Because my quest is for the void, the black, and the bare!” This oscillation in the status of both the natural object and the consciousness that perceives it cancels the modalities of a soothing dialectic of mutually complementing zones. Natural predicates come to be contaminated by the abstraction of human/social creation

["Vast woods, you terrify me like cathedrals"], whereas nature must be voided of anything that can remotely be imbued with meaning ["How you would please me, O Night, without those stars / Whose light speaks a language I understand!"]. There is no equilibrial dialectic between sensory object and conceiving consciousness here but a struggle between antagonistic forces that leaves the latter perpetually suspended under the threat of extinction. In this case one does not encounter the ascending movement that signals the distancing of consciousness from terrestrial nature but, on the contrary, the internalisation of earth-bound matter within consciousness. This integration does not lead to repose or the aggrandisement of the conceiving powers, but to the transposition of natural strife and chaos into an entity that can be called "consciousness" yet can no longer be defined in terms of particularised, meaning-assorting presence. The images of levitation and fall that geometricalise moral-cum-political struggles have given way to the disincarnation of human consciousness that is effected for the sake of an ultimate depletion of positive contents.¹⁰ The whole operation transpires not by virtue of the enhancement of the capacity of the mind to transcend its entanglement with earthly matter and thus effect an awareness of itself to the second degree. This consciousness has nothing in common with the faculty that allegedly posits its own contents in and through a transparent dialectic with the natural world. It cannot function as a metaphor of the desired commensurability of language and matter and is therefore powerless to inhabit the concept of cognitive wholeness that it promises.

¹⁰ For a characteristic instance of the relativisation of moral polarities through their shading off into an ensemble of *geometrically* opposed forces, see "Hymne à la beauté" (OC I: 24-5).

Baudelaire's poetry resists the assuagement of tension that a non-ambivalent crystallisation of the realm of the concept in and through its dynamic instantiation in the form would offer. This resistance, which is thematised in the above poem in the form of the mutual incomprehension and recalcitrance of matter and consciousness, points negatively to what I regard as an endemic quality of avant-garde poetry, namely the labour to accommodate linguistically the possibility of aconceptual experience. Mallarmé's poetry can legitimately be read as belonging in this constellation of thought, whereas Pound's *Pisan Cantos* point to the labour to grasp reality before, and beyond, the interference of intellectual complications. The tension mentioned above will serve as the focus of the ensuing analysis of the mortification of the physical and historical bodies in Baudelaire.

In concluding this section, it must be restated that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's contentions vis-à-vis (German) Romantic theory have been deployed in an attempt to embed Baudelaire's poetic practice in a conceptual vicinity within which issues of subjectivity and creativity were addressed in non-egological terms. This poetry does not shun away from the task of integrating the tropological sedimentation of its meaning and the inherent instability of cognitive referentiality as primary concerns. The poetic treatment of concerns that are intrinsic to language is an integral interest of literature-cum-language and not the exclusive property of a specific historically recognisable period or genre. The succeeding slackening of the awareness of the language-immanent cognitive instability, which took place in the name of a symbolist rehabilitation of lost meaning and presence, was not destinal. It constituted only one of the open

avenues that could be traversed, and the one most reluctant to measure up to the extremity of the primary texts, for that matter. The negative valorisation here concerns the New Critical, organicist reception of the symbolist texts, of course, rather than the poetry itself.

Tilottama Rajan's insistence on the fact that the dissolution of lyrical autotelism is the work of Romantic texts themselves¹¹ is especially apposite to the exploration of genealogical links¹² and the understanding of a textual practice which, as Rajan explains apropos of several Romantic paradigms, interweaves lyrical and discursive paradigms and thus transforms lyric from a monological to a dialogical form.¹³ The dialogical dimension of Baudelaire's poetry has been emphasised by commentators such as Ross Chambers, Richard Terdiman, Barbara Johnson, Barbara Blood, and others, and will be discussed further on especially in terms of the texts exhibiting an unusual awareness of their historical controlling premises and conjunctural character. It will be argued that this awareness renders all accusations of a self-reflexivity allegedly barring access to the historical terrain irrelevant and self-serving.

Baudelaire's narratives dramatise the hiatus between what is told and the telling of it,¹⁴ in other words the gap between constataion and performance, and thus acquire the character of an endeavour that has implications far wider than those traditionally ascribed to literature. This endeavour should not be made to

¹¹ See Tilottama Rajan, "Romanticism and the death of Lyric Consciousness," in *Lyric Poetry Beyond New Criticism*, 198.

¹² The term "genealogical" has been deployed throughout in the sense that Michel Foucault gave it in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, among other texts. It is a matter of notional associations and not of empirically verifiable rapports.

¹³ See Rajan, "Romanticism and the death of Lyric Consciousness," 200.

¹⁴ See Rajan, "Romanticism and the death of Lyric Consciousness," 196.

collapse into a transcendentalism of form or concept, or into an ensemble of mediated reflections of reality grids in the texts. Baudelaire's poetry, and this is perhaps the most significant link it has with the Jena theorists, is unable to produce the concept of semantic rehabilitation that it promises. This inability has been posited by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy as a distinct characteristic of texts produced by Friedrich Schlegel and is related to the excess of the creative process vis-à-vis "the general theoretical (or philosophical) power of which it is nonetheless the completion."¹⁵ What fissures the aesthetic closure and self-reflexiveness diagnosed in the case of Symbolism is exactly this non-perfectibility of the writing process and the way it is textually engaged through an allegorical and imagistic abundance aptly present in Baudelaire. The intercalation of micro-narratives in several of the poems ("Le Cygne," for example) serves the purpose of accentuating the non-closure, and the non-cumulative force, of the writing process. The dialectic of auto-organisation and auto-dissolution distances the texts from the organismic syntheses of New Criticism and its homologisation of intending consciousness and referent. In short, the Baudelairean text is not conducive to a New Critical ideality. One of the factors that bars this ideality is the poet's special understanding of memory. In Baudelaire memory serves both as a defence against the excessive stimuli of modern life and as an agent that dissolves identity. Its dual character has been analysed by Walter Benjamin and his analyses will now serve as a further pivotal point.

¹⁵ See *The Literary Absolute*, 92. The force of transcendentality, that is, a movement which is asymptotic in relation to its enabling premises, and which never succumbs to a transcendentalism of concept, is admirably delineated by the authors. Their analyses seem to enhance the prospects for a future re-elaboration of the relations between the German Romantics and French Symbolism.

CHAPTER FOUR

ELLIPSES OF MEMORY

This is the use of memory: For liberation
T. S. Eliot, "Four Quatrets"

The deterioration of communal experience and crisis-oriented reason

Walter Benjamin distinguishes, in his "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," between *Erlebnis* ("lived time") and *Erfahrung* (inner experience).¹ What characterises modern life, according to him, is the disintegration of the socio-symbolic realm and of collective patterns of remembering. A collective horizon of values and a communal imaginary that mediates remembrance contribute to the preservation of a commonality of interests. Within this framework the distinction between voluntary and involuntary recollection loses its polar character. Ideally, the two modes of recall should be entwined so as to preclude the irruption of traumatic psychic inscription through the successful temporal and cognitive integration of experience. Benjamin writes:

Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past. The rituals with their ceremonies, their festivals..., kept producing the amalgamation of these elements of memory over and over again. They triggered recollection at certain times and remained handles of memory for a lifetime. In this way, voluntary and involuntary recollection lose their mutual exclusiveness.²

According to Benjamin's diagnostic schema, the ritualistic character of this collective recalling has succumbed to the fragmentation of experience under the modern arrangement of forces. I concur that the examined poetry testifies to the

¹ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 117; also 113-17.

² Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 117.

decline of experience and serves as a sensitive register of it. I also believe, however, that it constitutes a defence against it (self-undermining since it thematically and rhetorically predicates its own failure), and an illusory compensation for the loss of collective traditions.³ I must also deposit my scepticism towards the nostalgia for a pre-lapsarian plenitude of collective experience and memory that, at least by implication, Benjamin seems to project onto Baudelaire's poetry, and longs for himself. The loss of organismic collectivity whose demise Benjamin is so ready to accuse Baudelaire of not properly lamenting⁴ is treated by the poetry as a reality that cannot be restricted within particular historical constraints. *Les Fleurs du mal* is not a poetry of nostalgia for a lost conceptual afflatus but a sensitive chronicle of the inner strife of language to accommodate the perpetual slippage of historical experience and the impossibility of a plenitude of historical and conceptual presence.

The Freudian framework upon which Benjamin bases his observations is rendered conspicuous by him, even if in a typically ambivalent way. The premise underlying the whole Freudian schema as read by Benjamin consists in the non-retentive character of the conscious mental processing of stimuli. The incompatibility between consciousness alertness and the retention of memory traces is emphasised along with the corresponding realisation that trauma results upon the miscarriage of the protective shield of consciousness. This latter allows the inscription of a memory-trace directly in the unconscious.⁵ The decline of communal horizons of understanding erodes the protective barriers of collective

³ See Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 113.

⁴ See, characteristically, *Baudelaire*, 172.

⁵ See Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 113-7.

consciousness and memory that would ideally help the subject process experience and successfully absorb its traumatic impact. If “Baudelaire made it his business to parry the shocks,” as Benjamin claims,⁶ then it is in the “Spleen” series that this defence is more eloquently substantiated in the form of a temporality and memory of *Erlebnis*. The experiences therein are meant to string out into a coherent and cognitively accessible ensemble to which the subject can relate as their bearer. However, the facticity of this defensive temporality, the imminent encroachment of corrosive time and the poetic narrator’s histrionic defensive postures, recapitulate the ambivalent theme of a temporality that threatens existence while still constituting the latter’s ultimate line of defence vis-à-vis traumatic impact.⁷

The following poem is exemplary in the intensity of its thematic commitment.

L'HORLOGE

“Remember! Souviens-toi, prodigue! Esto memor!

(Mon gosier de métal parle toutes les langues.)

Les minutes, mortel folâtre, sont des gangues

Qu’il ne faut pas lâcher sans en extraire l’or!

“Souviens-toi que le Temps est un joueur avide

Qui gagne sans tricher, à tout coup! C’est la loi.

Le jour décroît; la nuit augmente; souviens-toi!

Le gouffre a toujours soif; la clepsydre se vide.

“Tantôt sonnera l’heure où le divin Hasard,

Où l’auguste Vertu, ton épouse encor vierge,

Où le Repentir même (oh! La dernière auberge!),

Où tout se dira: Meurs, vieux lâche! Il est trop tard!”

(OC I: 81)

⁶ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 114.

⁷ Temporality receives a persistently ambivalent treatment in Baudelaire’s poetry. Being the enemy of man, the destroyer of stability, the harbinger of decay and death, it still communicates contents of liberatory transience, and of the inevitable erasure of the pain that human experience entails. It feels occasionally as if it rescinds the experiencability of the world and thus shields the subject from protracted suffering. In its disjunctive force, it guarantees the non-relatability of remembered reality and the one of the present, and thus renders pain inoperative and irrelevant.

THE CLOCK

"Remember! *Souviens-toi*, spendthrift one! *Esto Memor!*
(My metallic throat speaks all the languages.)
The minutes, merry mortal, are seams
That you shouldn't drop before distilling all their gold!

"Remember that Time is an avid gambler
That wins in every blow! It's the nature of the game.
The day is declining; night increases; *remember!*
The bottomless pit is always thirsty; the clepsydra runs
dry.

"The hour will shortly strike when divine Chance,
Or austere Virtue, your still-virgin spouse,
Or even repentance itself (oh! the last resting place of
all!),
Where everything will scream: Die, you old coward!
It's too late!"

The keen perception of time points to the purely defensive character of consciousness, a condition that relates to the modern subject's determination of reality in terms of crisis. The agility characterising consciousness aims at intercepting shocks. The crisis-oriented reason that subtends the modern experience, then, is integral to Baudelaire's poetry. That Modernity conceives of external reality as inherently threatening and as immanently fissured by an always imminent collapse of representation, is a common topos. The way, though, this conception is integrated into the poetic practices of the era, and, most significantly, the way it is coextensible with the intensification, aestheticisation, and the eventual bankruptcy of the political domain that is contemporary to us, has been largely unexplored. Baudelaire's circumscription of temporality and subjectivity acquires a particular sense-inflection when seen within this perspective.

The archaeological belabouring of this crisis-oriented angle would take us back to tragic Greece via Nietzsche, the German Romantics, of course, and German philology. What was formulated in the Hellenic realm as crisis-oriented reason and embodied in tragedy, ritual, and the mysteries, has been bequeathed to Modernity through the mediation of the German Romantics. ^{Lacoue-}✓ Labarthe and Nancy's archaeological tracing of this crisis-fissured reason back to the Greeks is particularly revealing of the pervasive character of the predicament and the flexibility of its forms in the face of subsequent historical appropriations.⁸

One of the various inflections that the reason/unreason dichotomy has assumed in the poetry of Baudelaire is Christianity versus Satanism. This binomial arrangement should not be understood as a negative reaffirmation of a religious orthodoxy. Satanism in Baudelaire, the project of evilification, stands as the ultimate point of a trajectory that started with the agenda of beautification and crossed through spleen intensification. It acquires its particular modalities in the light of the necessity for the polarisation of the thematic kernels that make up the narratives. This necessity is strategic and becomes unavoidable in the context of thematic elaborations that revolve around the loss of experiential coherence, as has already been argued. Intensification, within which religious divisions polarise, makes up for the loss of essentiality at the level of social reality and its textual transcriptions.

⁸ See *The Literary Absolute*, 10: "What comes to light is well-known: a previously imperceptible hiatus in Greek "classicism," the traces of a savage prehistory and terrifying religion, the hidden, nocturnal, mysterious, and mystical face of Greek "serenity," an equivocal art barely detached from madness and "orgiastic" (one of Schlegel's pet words) fury. In sum, tragic Greece. Like Hölderlin during the same period –but differently, although Schelling ensures the tradition, and in a "dialecticizing" mode that will follow a well-known course from Hegel to the young Nietzsche– the Schlegels invent what becomes known (under various names) as the opposition of the Apollonian and the Dionysian."

“La Vie antérieure” I: the reconstitution of past life *après-coup*

The loss of essentiality that Baudelaire's poetry registers is textually integrated through a narrative mode whose binding premise is that of involuntary memory. The latter constitutes a medium that is allegedly flexible enough to deal with the disintegration of social experience and distil some form of meaningful core from its fragments. The paradoxical character of the whole endeavour, however, becomes apparent when one considers that this mode of remembrance can primarily accommodate traumatic experiences, that is, experiences that were not processed properly by consciousness because of their traumatic impact.⁹ Involuntary memory constitutes the correlate of a mode of reasoning that conceives reality as inherently fissured by crisis. Within this context, moving from the remembrances of the *idéal* to the marmoreal quality of splenetic time, from the gradual exposure of the facticity of the former to the threatening character of the latter, a narrative is stabilised wherein this difficult relation between reminiscing and the exposure to reifying temporality is put into relief.

In many of Baudelaire's narratives what is targeted by memory is an earlier life which, however, in itself constitutes the effect of *après-coup* elaborations. Within this mnemonic exertion the erection of screen memories aiming at holding the void of experiential content at bay serves as the organising principle. Additionally, the effort to re-sediment a minimally

⁹ See Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 114. He writes: “Only traumatic experience resonates deeply enough in memory to become the stuff of characteristically modern lyric poetry.”

¹⁰ See J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1988), 410-11: “Freud, coming back to the distinction between screen memories and other childhood memories, goes so far as to raise a more general question: are there memories of which we may truly say that they *emerge from*, or merely memories which are *related to*, our childhood?” It is the latter problematic that I have retained in my liberal usage of the term.

functional socio-symbolic realm is apparent within the diegeses. The obvious wilfulness of the effort, however, and the thematically embedded awareness of its factitiousness, gear memory away from a pursuit that would seemingly involve an encasement of essences. In the case of “La Vie antérieure,” for example, the thematised previous life is internally punctuated by the awareness of the theatrical character of the depicted landscape as much as by the reduction of past life to an exotic *scene*, a topos of artificiality and constructiveness.

C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,
Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
Et des esclaves nus, tous imprégnés d'odeurs,

Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,
Et dont l'unique soin était d'approfondir
Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir. (OC
I: 17-8)

There I lived in calm voluptuousness,
Surrounded by azure, waves and splendours
And naked slaves giving off perfumes
Who refreshed my brow with palms,
And whose only care was to penetrate
The secret sorrow of which I pined away.

The reified and factitious nature of the remembrance indicates an unusual textual awareness. It concerns the intentional character of the effort to muster and sediment the power of remembrance in the mode of alertness against the inscription of traumatic memory-traces and the surrounding disintegration of the socio-symbolic order. The construction of an artificial realm of *Erlebnis* (lived time) thematically accentuates the primary disjunction between the latter and *Erfahrung* (lived experience with a core of inalienable experiential content). It also implicates the impossible dialectic between a serial temporality underlying

the splenetic experience and the atemporal character of correspondences, synaesthetic or not. Regardless of whether the correspondences are predicated in the mode of simultaneity or not, (Benjamin claims that they partake of the temporal dimension),¹¹ the spleen poems presuppose an awareness of temporality that differs from the ritualistic reconstruction of past experience, actually lived or faked as such, characterising correspondences and the *idéal* poems.¹² "La Vie Antérieure" is particularly relevant because it encapsulates this tension between anamnesis deploying the correspondences as "data of remembrance"¹³ and the *Nachträglichkeit* as it were (re) construction of an experience of *idéal Erlebnis* the factitiousness of which is rendered conspicuous by the mode of narrative (the explicitly non-realistic orientalism of the depicted scene). As Claire Brunet writes, "where correspondences ceased to be evident, one still had to extract and unfold them." Their true character is that of an "imperative" rather than a fact.¹⁴

"La Vie antérieure" imparts the mnemonic endeavour's contribution to making up the experiential referent. It textually enhances the process whereby the latter shapes up in the anacritic moment as an object of understanding. Reality referents of past life come to be constituted at the moment of mnemonic labour,

¹¹ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 141: "There are no simultaneous correspondences The murmur of the past may be heard in [them]."

¹² It is not easy to disentangle the *spleen* from the *idéal* poems. It is relatively safe to classify "La Beauté," "L' Idéal," "La Vie Antérieure," "Les Phares," "Élévation" and "Correspondances," of course, under the former category. Still, with poems such as "L'Albatros," "L'Homme et la Mer," "Hymne à la beauté," things get complicated. Even the more "bright" poems of the *idéal* agenda are not free from a violent imagery that pits forces against one another. The dimension of *agon* is present throughout. There is also a subterranean dialogue between poems that belong in differing sections, yet whose meaning is transformed when read in counterpoint. "L' Invitation au voyage," for example, emanates sinister undercurrents when read in juxtaposition to "Un Voyage à Cythère."

¹³ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 141.

¹⁴ Claire Brunet, "Présentation," in Charles Baudelaire, *Critique d'art suivi de Critique musicale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), xxxvi. "Correspondances" (OC I: 11) has served as the perpetual point of reference upon which most symbolist-aesthetic hermeneutics have converged.

ergo the pervasive sense of *déjà vu* that many Baudelairean narrators voice.¹⁵ "Le secret douloureux [*painful* secret]" afflicting the subject of narrative cuts across the idyllic serenity of the staged scene and externalises the unsettling sensation of reified experience that impinges on the phoney equilibrium of past experience, fantasy, and memory. It brings to the fore the undergirding factitiousness of the anacletic character of the "remembered" event, its constitutiveness, the transparent staging of its perjurious nature. It is telling that the *mélange* of "sea-swells," "the images of the skies," and, most significantly, the "hues of sunset mirrored in my eyes," (OC I: 18) transpires in the mode of simultaneity. This latter bears upon the fabrication of the remembered event as an act of consciousness consummated within language. The mnemonic labour is productive rather than animated by a retentive fixation that aims to preserve the past. The sadness perforating the pseudo-pastoral scene emanates from the latent negotiability of the past and, most important, the destruction of the essentialist teleology that mandates the preformation of the future in past registrations. On the contrary, "... the past dissolves in the present, so that the future becomes (once again) an *open question*, instead of being specified by the fixity of the past (... the primal event, the 'first' event in the double articulation of *Nachträglichkeit*)."¹⁶ The text resonates with the assumption that "*all* memories are screen memories, screens which it makes no sense to look behind in search of the 'original, primal' trace."¹⁷ The "previous

¹⁵ I take up the issue of the formative power of anamnesis with regard to the essence of the remembered event in counterpoint to John Forrester's comments on Freud's notion of the premonitory dreams. "[T]he discovery was that premonitory dreams are constructed in the moment they are remembered: they are forms akin to *déjà vu*; and most significantly, their being rendered null as dreams demonstrates clearly how, for Freud, the dream is *dissolved* by the interpretative narrative" (John Forrester, *Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida*, 365).

¹⁶ Forrester, *Seductions of Psychoanalysis*, 206.

¹⁷ Forrester, *Seductions of Psychoanalysis*, 206.

life" is the effect of an on-going production of contents in the interest of sustaining the semiotic machine of language, metonymic desire, and diacritical memory.

Correspondences and imperilled memory: "La Vie antérieure" II

The vie antérieure opens up the temporal abyss
in things; solitude discloses the spatial one
before human beings.

Benjamin, "Central Park"

Benjamin quotes from the poem discussed so far in order to highlight the temporal character of correspondences and possibly salvage them from a metaphysic of nostalgia and a transcendental restorative consciousness. He writes: "There are no simultaneous correspondences, such as were cultivated by the Symbolists later. The murmur of the past may be heard in the correspondences, and the canonical experience of them has its place in a previous life."¹⁸ Benjamin is ambiguous here, in the sense that he holds the rich connotations of his observations in suspense. "The *correspondances* are the data of remembrance –not historical data, but data of prehistory. What makes festive days great and significant is the encounter with an earlier life. Baudelaire recorded this in a sonnet entitled 'La Vie antérieure'. The images of caves and vegetation, of clouds and waves which are evoked at the beginning of this second sonnet rise from the warm vapour of tears, tears of homesickness."¹⁹ *Pace* Benjamin, the homesickness in question is a sham rendering apparent in a negative mode the dystopian nature of the power of remembrance engendered by

¹⁸ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 141.

¹⁹ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 141.

the *idéal*. The encounter with an earlier life is entirely phantasmatic.

As regards the correspondences and their transformation in the itinerary leading from the project of beautification²⁰ to that of spleen intensification, the temporal condensation which Benjamin implies ("the *correspondances* are the data of remembrance") is always accompanied by the stripping of content that is consequent upon the collapse of socio-symbolic experience. It is to the latter that the temporal oscillation between accessing a past scene and fabricating one in the present is germane. The narratives, therefore, do not engage temporal differentials in the name of a nostalgia for the plenitude of a communal calendar. Baudelaire's poetry exhibits the awareness of the latter's mythic character.

The temporal fluctuations in the Baudelairean text, the "flash-back" character of mnemonic sequences and their *non-historical* nature,²¹ are always implicated into what Eugene Holland traces as "[t]he absolute loss of connection between instinctual drives and both social and personal meaning," and the prevalence of an "ego-defensive anxiety."²² The same mechanism is operative in the case of shock-defence strategies deployed in the correspondences programme, but also in different ways preempted in the spleen/*idéal* difficult dialectic.²³ Holland calls for the *historical* understanding of the anxiety over meaning-

²⁰ For the meaning of beautification in Baudelaire's poetry see Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 13-1: "Beauty, on this conception, is a function of poetic imagination alone, deriving its value solely from the investment of poetic desire, *regardless of the nature of the object itself*" (emphasis added). Even the rotting corpse of a prostitute will serve as an aesthetic source of amazement for the textual narrator in "Une Charogne" (OC I: 31-2).

²¹ See Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 143. He writes: "In the *spleen*, time becomes palpable; the minutes cover a man like snowflakes. *This time is outside history*, as is that of the *mémoire involontaire*. But in the *spleen* the perception of time is supernaturally keen; every second finds consciousness ready to intercept its shock" (emphasis added). The "flash-back" character of memory relates to the necessity to ward off the traumatic impact of improperly screened experience and replicates the primary characteristic of shock which is its suddenness.

²² Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 268-9.

²³ See Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 268.

recognition and the successful coding/decoding in the social register, and links this demand and possibility with the primacy of exchange-value over use-value. This is a perfectly legitimate gesture, yet it concerns only one facet of what is at stake. The mnemonic leap into previous life, "the murmur of the past," is not one that solicits testimonial certainties. "La Vie Antérieure" makes a scene out of the compulsion to return to past life, but this enterprise is shorn of any hope of retrieving any autarkic gist of experience. Therefore, the scene described cannot be embedded in a causal sequence. In "L'Ennemi" (OC I: 16) the effort to "reclaim the flooded land" of youthful experience proves to be utterly futile: "Et qui sait si les fleurs nouvelles que je rêve / Trouveront dans ce sol lavé comme une grève / Le mystique aliment qui ferait leur vigueur? [And who knows if the new flowers of which I dream / Will ever find in this soil as thoroughly washed as the seashore / The mystic manna that will give them strength?]." ²⁴ The rhetorical question reaffirms the unavailing character of any endeavour to "rassembler à neuf les terres inondées, [reclaim the flooded land]," meaning the realm of anterior experience that has now been covered with successive layers of *Erlebnisse*.

It would be superfluous to point out that it was Benjamin who first fathomed the historical and political dimensions of Baudelaire's work along with the poetry's grappling with the reification of both reality givens and aesthetic language. His analyses have also revealed the historical dimension inherent in the modern anxiety over meaning-recognition that Baudelaire admirably exemplifies. In "Baudelaire or the Streets of Paris" he writes apropos of technology and

²⁴ OC I: 16 / CV I: 69; translation Francis Scarfe's.

aestheticism that they "[b]oth abstract from the social reality of man."²⁵ These views are well-known and amply commented upon. However, the "Now-Time" dimension that subtends Benjamin's unorthodox historicism is relevant to his understanding of Baudelaire's work as well. The experience of time that he associates with remembrance is not horizontal or cumulative but interspersed by ecstatic moments that rupture the temporal continuum.²⁶ It accommodates an extra-historical or transcendental element that could help qualify the palindromic movement between resignation and anticipation underlying Baudelairean spleen. The leaps of memory with their destruction of linear continua are in a state of mutual illumination vis-à-vis this heterogeneous temporality: "[E]xperience [*Erfahrung*] [accompanies] one back into the far reaches of time, fills and divides time."²⁷ However, and this is where I diverge from Benjamin, he projects characteristics of psychological/personological memory onto the social terrain. He affirms the possibility of a collective non-linear memory solicited by, and reinforcing, a collective understanding. The "days of remembrance [*Tage des Eingedenkens*]"²⁸ mentioned above, the calendar, festival days that are supposed to reflect a community's solidarity with its own past and affirm its accumulated experience, are points of intersection *within* the temporal/historical continuum that are both an integral part of it and also come to fissure it *from the outside*.²⁹

²⁵ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 172.

²⁶ See Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 255: "[The materialist historian] grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time."

²⁷ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 136.

²⁸ See Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 142.

²⁹ See Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 139: "These significant days are days of *completing time* They are days of recollection, not marked by any experience. They are not connected with the other days, but *stand out from time*" (emphasis added).

Benjamin is anxious to conjoin involuntary memory with a remembrance that will be useful to collective patterns of self-understanding. He wants to preserve the possibility of social intervention while upsetting the linear time of historicism. The schema, however, does not unfold unencumbered. Baudelaire's "spiritual year"³⁰ encases no accumulated experience or common essence through which to reach collective understanding. Days of remembrance do not necessarily promote the critical consciousness of one's political conditions. They may equally foster the illusion of social solidarity. Baudelairean memory, on the contrary, brackets the injunctions of collective imaginaries by exposing their factitious character.

Benjamin's criticism of Proust's non-volitional aesthetic remembrance is relevant to Baudelaire too. For Proust "redemption is [his] private show."³¹ Benjamin wants it both ways. He wants to use a model of involuntary memory to offset historicist horizontal patterns of temporality and history, but this model must be shorn of its individualistic, atomistic dimensions. The danger always lurks, however, that a spurious collective will ultimately be asserted. The step from Baudelaire and Proust's privative non-volitional remembrance to a non-horizontal collective memory and understanding is more of a gap. It ultimately hinges on one's faith in the possibility of an *epiphanic* destruction of time and essence continua: "he [the historian who "grasps the *constellation* which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one"] establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' *which is shot through with chips of messianic time*."³² Baudelaire's poetry does not accommodate the desperate hope for a redemptive

³⁰ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 142.

³¹ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 145, fn. 80.

³² Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 255; emphasis added.

ec-stasis/exit from time and history. On the contrary, it reveals non-volitional memory as a non-dependable model of self-understanding, while refusing to subscribe to collective modes of remembering and making sense of one's reality. The sorrowful memory of "la vie antérieure," which obviously is nobody's appurtenance in the privative sense, reflects an act of interminable mourning. Baudelaire's melancholic remembrance, however, is not necessarily debilitating. It translates the awareness of historical impasses as much as the haphazard and perilous character of all mnemonic endeavours to relate to the past and cement a sense of present. It is dislodged from the comforts of experience restoration and does not succumb to any symbolist mystique, either.

Baudelaire's mnemonic project reveals that the salvaging of the past through volitional memory jeopardises its essence by turning it into empty *souvenir*. Involuntary memory, on the other hand, feeds upon a constitutively imperilled form of experience. Its unpredictable character renders it incompatible with the exigencies of political vigilance. It can never assume the form of a solidaristic memory. Adorno writes that "just as no earlier experience is real that has not been loosed by *involuntary remembrance* from the deathly fixity of its isolated existence, so conversely, no memory is guaranteed, existent in itself, indifferent to the future of him who harbours it; nothing past is proof, through its translation into mere imagination, against the curse of the empirical present."³³ Neither mode of memory is adequate to the restoration or preservation of past experience. Baudelaire's poetry problematises the essence of the latter category and reveals the impasses of both non-testimonial and collective memory.

³³ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 166; emphasis added.

The splenetic experience reverberates with a melancholic elongation of the present coupled with the sense of an imminent rupture that will upset the whole temporal schema. This rupture is both desired and dreaded. An *ecstatic* moment that is always imminent and fends off the closure of the mnemonic continuum seems to be lurking behind the *ennui* of elongated present. However, it is impossible to read within this pendulum-like temporal movement any epiphanic vestiges, and this is what sets the two temporal schemas apart within a compatible terrain. The epiphanic dimension seems to be constitutive of Benjamin's engagement with temporality and history and as such makes it impossible to align his thought with straight versions of historicism or equate it with Baudelaire's radical, even if negative, affirmation of the finitude effects of temporality. It is impossible to adequately address here the tension between Benjamin's insistence on a certain version of historical determination and the supra-historical or even messianic dimensions of his thought, but the tension must be registered.

Ultimately, I consider Benjamin's work to point beyond the mutual closure of rhetorical and historicist concerns and, therefore, consider it legitimate to draw on his complex elaboration of the two spheres without a sense of contradiction. His complication of stereotypical notions of historical and mnemonic vigilance inexhaustibly renews his relevance to Baudelaire. One has only to turn to his insistence on involuntary memory and his advocacy of its relevance to a critical historiography in order to realise the complexity and profundity of his engagement with a new historical rationality. It would admit of the aleatory dimension while not compromising political and mnemonic vigilance and an ethics of solidarity with those discarded by the impetus of progressivist

historicism. Following Nietzsche's suspiciousness towards injunctions to commemorate and their correlate standardised hypertrophied archiving memory, he purveyed the notion of a critical historiography that would zero in on images instead of stories.³⁴ This is not an experimental or impressionistic *collage* of phenomenally antithetical conceptual paradigms, but the leverage of a critical relation to one's history that moves beyond the facile and illusional anamorphosis of past injustices and rumination of past discontent.

Baudelaire's project did justice to the dual character of memory and melancholy by concocting a melancholy memory that was not blind to its impasses and destructive potential. He did not normalise catastrophe nor did he construe it as an overwhelming condition that preempted all responses to it but that of naïve awe. The poetry made a critical use of what Benjamin implies by *Eingedenken* [solidaristic memory] but refused to put faith in privileged monadic moments that would allegedly rupture the continua of history, time, and organic memory. Its images hanker after experiential coherence while simultaneously problematising the transmissibility of experience and the assumption that it comprises an inalienable core to be distilled after successive temporal layers have been removed by involuntary memory. This is the gist of "La Vie antérieure."

Eugene Holland summarises some facets of the point in question, adjusting them to his vocabulary, this way: "The rapid pace of change and the predominance of exchange-value in market society decode what Benjamin calls

³⁴ See Benjamin, "Konvolut N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," 462: "What distinguishes images from the 'essences' of phenomenology is their historical index For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time [E]ach 'now' is the now of a particular recognizability."

'the handles of experience' protecting the psyche, thereby generating additional anxiety in its defence. The modernism that registers the prevalence of anxiety over gratification is a function of the market existence."³⁵ However, the historical inflection with which the whole discussion is invested by the two is a reality to which I can only respond through situating Baudelaire's aestheticism and politico-historical awareness in terms of a relation between mutually undermining kernels, even if it is not a case of an absolutely exclusive opposition. The logic of chronological annexation to which Holland seems to adhere mitigates the edge of Baudelaire's insights since it negatively affirms the possibility of a futural exit from the crisis. Beneath the rhetoric of crisis lies a soothing reassurance as to the temporary nature of the catastrophe. The examined poetry, however, does not sustain for long the reassuring illusion of a conceptual or political equilibrium *à venir* since it codifies the failure of the protocols that would guarantee it. When it comes to Benjamin, I must register again his procrastination in deciding between an analytical mode privileging the determinative role of historico-economic infrastructures and a discursive mode that translates a viable sensitivity to tropological specifics. He conjugates the two modes without resolving their antagonism. He does so, however, in a way that reveals and enriches the content of this tension while enhancing the potentialities of both a historicist and an aesthetic stance.

³⁵ Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 269.

“Le Balcon”: the mnemotechnics of love

The prevalence of anxiety over gratification³⁶ registered in several of the poems indicates the ambivalent nature of the shock-defence strategy consisting in the strategic alliance of *idéal* and *correspondances*. Eugene Holland summarises the paradoxical nature of the whole endeavour:

The shock-defense is not without serious consequences: the process “of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents” in effect turns the incident “into a moment that has been lived (*Erlebnis*) (p. 117);³⁷ it thereby “sterilize[s] the incident for poetic experience” (p. 116). Baudelaire thus appears as a lyric poet whose conditions of experience threaten to preclude the possibility of writing lyric poetry. Baudelaire’s response to this challenge, according to Benjamin, is the doctrine of correspondences, an “attempt to establish experience in a crisis-proof form”³⁸

The inherently unreliable nature of the correspondences has to do with the contradictory address of the shattering of experience in a lyrical form that tries to retain the cohesion lost at the level of disintegrated reality. The inevitable instability of the process shows through the angle of allegorical memory whose referents spring from deceased experience [*Erfahrung*] disguising itself as *Erlebnis*.³⁹ It is what Benjamin calls the remembrance of the *Grübler*, a memory in which “human knowledge ... is something piecemeal –in an especially pregnant sense: it is like the jumble of arbitrarily cut pieces from which a puzzle is

³⁶ The impossibility of sexual gratification in Baudelaire’s poetry should be linked to the laboriousness of cognitive pursuits. One reflects the other. The pervasiveness of sex that the characters’ tortured ambivalence comes to denounce mirrors the tyrannical nature of cognitive stability that inhabits the narratives in the mode of a thematic desideratum overtly recognised as a socially sanctioned channel of power imposition. The poems addressed to the poor, the prostitute, the pervert, and the pariah parade this denunciation quite overtly.

³⁷ Holland cites from Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 117. The same applies to the following page references.

³⁸ Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 140.

³⁹ See Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” trans. Lloyd Spencer and Mark Harrington, *New German Critique* 34 (winter 1985), 49; cited in Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 181.

assembled.”⁴⁰ This construal of memory amounts to a mode of remembering whose organising principle is that of a defence against ego-dismantling shocks and their traumatic inscription in consciousness. The fragmentary and strained character of the memory morsels betrays a poetry that overtly belabours the nature of mnemonic inscriptions. Baudelaire’s poetry is about the tension between the voluntary/involuntary character of memories and the axes of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, and includes within its thematic space the retroactive attempt at mastering and/or preempting traumatic memory residues. The deflation of the traumatic incidents’ contents through their being given a specific point in a serial temporal schema signals what has been focalised above in terms of the effects of a *Grübler* memory. This operation causes the mortification of past-matrices and the reified character of memory-traces: the traumatic content disintegrates and at the same time the *souvenirs* get embedded in a pseudo-temporal narrative grid aiming at alleviating suffering by defusing the memory-traces of their pathogenic, ego-shattering force. The intellect can thus turn the traumatic incident into “a moment that has been properly lived (*Erlebnis*)”⁴¹ and has therefore been cognitively appropriated. Its (traumatic) content will have been exhausted as an object of consciousness through the act of inscription. The way this inscription, however, exceeds the boundaries of classical representational models of reflexion in Baudelaire becomes apparent when one concentrates on the idiosyncratically distortional character of his imagery. The wilful character of this integration is apparent in this poetry that tries to turn conditions adversarial to lyric poetry into

Benjamin writes: “The relic derives from the corpse; the souvenir from deceased experience [*Erfahrung*] which calls itself euphemistically *Erlebnis*.”

⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, “Konvolut J: Baudelaire,” 368.

⁴¹ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 117.

enabling ones. The texts try to make a narrative out of a condition that defies narrational embedment since it brackets the protocols of essence that would sustain it. The standardised response to trauma mandates that traumatic experiential contents must either be relegated to the realm of the unverbalisable or be ingrained in a horizontal temporal schema. The non-commensurability between traumatic experience and larger explanatory and temporal frameworks that is constitutive of the trauma itself is thus supposed to be filled up.

In “Le Balcon” a mnemotechnics that can be subsumed under a broadly conceived exertion of *Erlebnis* is instantiated in the form of an injunction to remember: “Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes he^ureuses / Et révis mon passé blotti dans tes genoux [I know the art of evoking the moments of happiness / And relive my past nestled at your feet].”⁴² The wilful character of reminiscing is accentuated by the ambivalently ironic repetition of the quoted phrase accompanied by an emphatic exclamation mark at the end of the strophe. The result is that what initially reads like a reminder of a capacity ends up as an ironic realisation of one’s ability to *artificially* reproduce a semblance of immediacy through the mnemonic recall of past happiness. This is far removed from the conservative response to trauma mentioned above. The last strophe, when approached under this light, reads like a recapitulation of a pervasive theme, i.e., the wilfulness behind the narrators’ mnemonic acts, the laboriousness of their anamnestic immersions, the effort to turn vanishing experience into retrievable essence, that is, *Erlebnis* experience: “Ces serments, ces parfums, ces baisers infinis / Renaîtraient-ils d’un gouffre interdit à nos sondes, / Comme montent au ciel les

⁴² Baudelaire, OC I: 37/CV, 101; translation modified.

soleils rajeunis / Après s'être lavés au fond des mers profondes? / Ô serments! ô parfums! Ô baisers infinis! [Those vows, those perfumes, infinity of kisses /—Will they ever be reborn from a fathomless underworld / Like suns refreshed rising up to the sky / After their cleansing in the deepest of seas? / O vows, O perfumes, O infinite kisses!].” The concluding question should be read literally as what it is, a question concerning the feasibility of the whole restorative endeavour, and not as a rhetorical decoy that would re-affirm the recapturing of past scenes suffused with a hypothetical contentment. In Baudelaire *Erlebnis* must be created *ex nihilo* since *Erfahrung* was never really there in the first place. This insight is integral to the texts. But this knowledge is powerless to posit what it targets as an artificial mnemonic plenitude or hinder the reactionary process of the transformation of experiential void into lived time (*Erlebnis*). “Le Balcon” is ironic of all efforts to ground the retrieval of a hypothetical self-presence in the mode of nostalgia for the past.

Baudelairean memory and Hegelian *Gedächtnis*

Cynthia Chase has commented on Baudelaire in a way that engages the issues of memory and representationality and links them with Hegelian *Gedächtnis*. She contends that in Baudelaire’s text “representation is represented as the activity of producing signs, which Hegel also calls *Gedächtnis*.”⁴³ What must be emphasised in the case of the latter is that it is “entirely unlike the mutual complementarity and interpenetration of form and content that characterizes

⁴³ Cynthia Chase, “Getting Versed: Reading Hegel with Baudelaire,” in *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 113-138.

symbolic art.”⁴⁴ In short, it renders impossible the passage from signifier-sedimentation to cognitive phenomenism. Paul de Man, upon whose construal of *Gedächtnis* I have drawn, writes apropos:

Memorization (*Gedächtnis*) has to be sharply distinguished from recollection and from imagination. It is entirely devoid of images (*bildlos*), and Hegel speaks derisively of pedagogical attempts to teach children how to read and write by having them associate pictures with specific words. But it is not devoid of materiality altogether. We can learn by heart only when all meaning is forgotten and words read as if they were a mere list of names Thought is entirely dependent on a mental faculty that is mechanical through and through, as remote as can be from the sounds and the images of the imagination or from the dark mine of recollection, which lies beyond the reach of words and of thought.

The synthesis between name and meaning that characterizes memory is an “empty link [*das leere Band*]” and thus entirely unlike the mutual complementarity and interpenetration of form and content that characterizes symbolic art (*Enz. III, par. 463*, p. 281). It is not aesthetic in the ordinary or in the classically Hegelian sense of the word. However, since the synthesis of memory is the only activity of the intellect to occur as sensory manifestation of an idea, *memory is a truth of which the aesthetic is the defensive, ideological, and censored translation* [emphasis added]. In order to have memory one has to be able to forget remembrance and reach the machinelike exteriority, the outward turn, which is retained in the German word for learning by heart, *auswendig lernen*.⁴⁵

De Man can legitimately proceed on the basis of the above to a statement germane to this discussion on memory and its link with the broader issue of subjectivity and essentiality in Baudelaire: “Memory effaces remembrance (or recollection) just as the I effaces itself.” A critique of the symbol follows that exposes its false convergence of sign and nature. “The faculty that enables thought to exist [*Memory/Gedächtnis*] also makes its preservation impossible. The art, the *techné*, of writing which cannot be separated from thought and from memorization can only be preserved in the figural mode of the symbol, the very

⁴⁴ Paul de Man, “Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s *Aesthetics*,” *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981-82): 73.
⁴⁵ De Man, “Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s *Aesthetics*,” 772-3.

mode it has to do away with if it is to occur at all.” What must be stressed here in relation to Baudelaire is that this kind of memory renders the interiorisation of experience abortive. It is antithetical to it. In the way it shapes *Erinnerung*, therefore, Baudelaire’s work deals with the material inscription and eventual forgetfulness of ideal contents.⁴⁶ In the mechanical, wilful, staged memories that the textual protagonists labour to cement, the covering up of the primal gap between memory and ideal content is played out. The mnemonically accessed anterior experience retains only the formal decorum of past life. What is more, Baudelaire’s poetry accounts for the merely gestural retention of life contents in a narrativel mode that exposes the necessity of sustaining the binomial character of the inscription and its subsequent bracketing through the stratagem of a lyrical voice that is non-monological (another “contradiction” that translates the above relation).

I have already shown that “La Vie antérieure” registers the tension between *Erfahrung* (a putative inner experience, non-exhausted by a conscious appropriation of contents in its inceptive moment, inscribing indelible memory-traces) and *Erlebnis* (a hypothetical (re)lived time). The defensive and ideological form that both forms of memory and experience can take in order to protect the ideality of contents against the agency of material (and more mechanical) mnemonic inscriptions bears the name of aesthetic correspondences, the “defensive, ideological and censored translation” of which de Man speaks. It is their primary role to preserve the interiority and recuperability of contents against

⁴⁶ See de Man, “Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s Aesthetics,” 773-4. The internal antagonism between material inscription and content abstraction/ideality is given therein a thorough elaboration.

the encroachment of material inscriptions (i.e., signs) through hiding the “dependence of the progression from perception to thought ... on the mental faculty of memorization” [*Gedächtnis*].⁴⁷ Baudelaire’s text reads at times like a mnemotechnics of fabricated experience, as in “Le Balcon” where the “main” information/memory is immersed in a spatial background in such a way as to have the mnemonic content acquire the character of a mechanically produced *scene*. The textual narrator must suspend the ideal/conceptual content of the recalled scene in order to remember it at all. The fact that the poem closes with an ironic reminder of its own wilfulness and laboriousness (“Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses! [I know the art of evoking happy moments!]”) and with a literal question as to the feasibility of the mnemonic endeavour (“Ces serments, ces parfums, ces baisers infinis, / Renaîtront-ils d’un gouffre interdit à nos sondes, [Those vows, those perfumes, those infinite kisses, / Will they ever be reborn from a fathomless chasm]”), translates the knowledge that memory is a labour and injunction that does not by itself suffice to secure self-presence and self-witnessing. The recall labour in Baudelaire is inherently hindered not only, or exclusively, by the collapse of mnemonic collectivity (as Benjamin contends), but also by the lack of a foundation of essence in the present that would ideally guarantee a modicum of experiential coherence from which the mnemonic trajectory could safely emanate. At least in Baudelaire, and this is not insignificant, memory is not blind to the unhappiness of the others even though it is a memory without a properly sustaining I. This is the meaning of the ethicality of Baudelairean remembrance. His non-egological remembrance stages its own

⁴⁷ De Man, “Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s Aesthetics,” 772.

failure to recapture and/or posit the experiential origin, as well as its own refusal to be manipulated into an injunction of commemoration that would partake of the ethical dimension and be complicit with historicist progressivism. Still, exilic memory is explicitly aligned with the politically excluded in the last lines of "Le Cygne."⁴⁸

Baudelairean memory rehearses the conflict between a symbolic unfolding of corresponding essences and a serial metonymic mnemonic delirium that fails to anchor its own referents adequately. This inadequacy is reflected in the poetic narrators' perpetual working through of hermeneutic hypotheses in a condition that approximates a zero-degree referentiality. In "Un Voyage à Cythère" (OC I: 117-9/ CV, 222-5) the ~~de~~mythologisation of the classical Hellenic topos gradually yields ~~into~~ into an allegorical nightmare that recognises itself as such ("Le coeur enseveli dans cette allégorie [My heart was buried in that allegory]"). What started as the pursuit of a lost paradise has now turned not only into an "Eldorado banal" but a scene of death and decay, death of the human in the midst of a triumphal vociferous nature. The reminiscing narrator acknowledges the allegorical potential of the decaying hanged man's corpse and the whole scenery: "...et j'avais, comme en un suaire épais / Le coeur enseveli dans cette allégorie" ["as in the shrouds of death / I had my heart buried in that allegory"], yet desires to construe the whole image in terms of symbol: "Dans ton île, ô Vénus! Je n'ai trouvé debout / Qu'un gibet symbolique où pendait mon image... [In your island Venus I have found nothing / But a symbolic gallows with my own image hung

⁴⁸ "Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans une île, / Aux captifs, aux vaincus! ... à bien d'autres encor! [I think of sailors forgotten on a desert island, / Of the captives, the vanquished! ... and many more!]."

upon it]." The tension between the two tropes is glossed over by the thematic intensity, the ocular fervour and rhetorical fluidity of the text that manage to deflect attention from the antagonism of purely intra-linguistic phenomena. In Paul de Man's terms, the same way the I disguises itself as a symbol whenever it speaks of anything but itself in terms of sign,⁴⁹(that is, whenever it poses as ego) allegory is transformed into symbol for the sake of sustaining a *sine qua non* of referentiality, i.e., a minimal and allegedly non-arbitrary connectedness of intention (even if ultimately frustrated, as in this case) and encountered phenomenal reality. The final lines of the poem, however, deploy the mode of prayer in order to condense negatively the hiatus between intention and praxis. The disgust that the narrator experiences whenever he contemplates his "heart and body" accommodates the irreparable gap between the two spheres: "-Ah! Seigneur! Donnez-moi la force et le courage / De contempler mon coeur et mon corps sans dégoût! [O Lord give me the strength and courage / To contemplate my heart and body without disgust!]." This gap, however, is not cognitively exhausted in the moral realm but translates a "deeper" predicament: that of the randomness and temporal dispersion of experiential kernels and the defensive infusion of sense and specular phenomenality in an inherently meaningless trajectory. In the "symbolic gallows" of the text the narrator recognises his own hanging self, in the sense of someone whose aspirations to the plenitude of experience have been negated. It is this suffering ("Je sentis / Comme un vomissement, remonter vers mes dents / Le long fleuve de fiel des douleurs anciennes; [I felt / the long stream of gall of my past sufferings [rising] like a

⁴⁹ See De Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," 770.

vomit to my teeth,])" that the text engages in the guise of the exotic voyage. The Cytherean utopia is the scene where the interplay of moral disgust and ocular intensity translate the friction between an allegorical unhinging of *virtual* experiential contents and a putative symbolic sedimentation of mutually reverberating semantic kernels.⁵⁰

As regards the specular economy of Baudelaire's texts, most memories or encountered scenes revolve around a solid material basis. "Le Cygne" enacts the submission of concrete remembrance to a metamorphosis of perceptual givens that, however, does not detract from the edginess of the former ("Je ne vois qu'un esprit tout ce camp de baraques, / Ces tas de ^pcapitiaux / Là s'étalait jadis une ménagerie; [Only in my mind's eye can I see those miserable huts / A menagerie used to sprawl down there;]). The contrast between the realistic archiving of past reality that flares up in a near-ecstatic moment and a fluid "historical" framework that is there to imbue it with significance, lends many of the poems their poignancy. As Paul de Man writes, "Memory starts in a concrete perception,"⁵¹ in an itinerary that purportedly leads back to an originating cause or event. "[T]he perception is, as it were, the epiphany of the accumulated memories that give it meaning." The dialectic of memory and perception that de Man so aptly depicts, however, does not consolidate a symbolist chora wherein the exile from origin would be eradicated, but comes to erode this topos by shading off, in the case of Baudelaire at least, into an interplay of fabricated scenes and a petrifying material look. This interplay resists the containments of both idealism

⁵⁰ This poem is also an instance of a metaironic pure poetry. It perfects the transparency of the relation to nature to interhuman rapport that "Le Voyage" posits too. See Paul de Man, "Allegory and Irony in Baudelaire," in *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, 106.

⁵¹ De Man, "Image and Emblem in Yeats," in *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 198.

and realism. In chapter six (pages 118-20) I refer to *Augenschein*, this subliminal stare that resists intellectual intervention. Memory in the examined texts does not serve as a reconciling agent that helps negate the distance separating the exiles from their retreating origin, but on the contrary exaggerates the difference between consciousness and matter that all essentialisms try to bridge. Remembrance in Baudelaire emanates from a material basis and seems to be contained in a material perception.⁵² However, memories gradually inflect towards an exacerbation of the material dimension only to end up as attributes of a condition wherein the human parameter, i.e., consciousness as a begetter of memories, has been cancelled. What one gets in the end is a difficult to reconcile combination of phenomenally antithetical dimensions. On the one hand, an intensification of materiality (that should ideally point to an engulfing human consciousness working through its own experiential material) and, on the other hand, the transparency and disincarnation of memories/images that are primarily ocular yet cognitively silent. This silencing of mnemonic content does not signal the triumph of a transcendental imagination that has moved beyond the actualities of material positing. The movement here is one of a mutual and simultaneous hollowing out of essential attributes to such a degree that a dialectical sublation of the antagonistic itineraries is impossible. Neither an ethereal imagination nor an attachment to the material world come to organise the narratives but, quite to the contrary, the undermining of phenomenalist and transcendentalist matrices relating to each other in a pseudo-dialectical mode. The material basis of Baudelairean memory always fails to anchor the

⁵² See de Man, "Image and Emblem in Yeats," 199.

remembered scenes in a testimonially verifiable reality. It serialises its own givens in the mode of metonymy and then proceeds to bind them through the deployment of metaphorical and symbolic embedments that cannot, however, conceal the intrinsic formal concerns pressing in the guise of diegesis. “Le Voyage à Cythère” is ingrained with the antagonism between allegory and symbol and resorts to the stratagem of the lyrical voice that is suffused with the awareness of its own demise in order to unfold as the formal terrain of this tropological conflict. The conflict shapes up through the decoy of a lyrical consciousness that is supposed to lament the loss of the archetypal paradise. That Cythera is from the beginning exposed as a cliché, and even prior to the sight of the hanging corpse that resumes in its frigid materiality the conflict between matter and transcendence, points to the intra-textual awareness of its own devices and guises, as well as augurs the blockage of an ultimate hermeneutic exit.

Recapitulation: *Erlebnis* versus *Erfahrung*

The climactic point to which this *exposé* must lead is the tense dialectic between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* in the context of the disintegration of ideal contents in the case of the latter and their non-retrieval in the case of the former. *Erlebnis* in Baudelaire (that is, memories obeying the imperative of a more or less conscious emergence) tries to disguise itself as *Erfahrung* (that is, fully lived experience sustaining a minimal distillation of retrievable experiential essence) even though the relation between the two is to a certain extent one of mutual obliteration.⁵³ The immediacy that *Erfahrung* is synonymous with is contravened

⁵³ See Benjamin, “Central Park,” 49: “[T]he souvenir [derives] from deceased experience (*Erfahrung*) which calls itself euphemistically “*Erlebnis*.” See also Baudelaire, 145: “The

whenever a retroactive act like that of (wilful) mnemonic retrieval occurs. The I that is supposed to sustain this act functions in terms compatible with a canonical notion of symbolicity since, in de Man's terms, it represents as a determined relationship to the world (that between the recall and the putatively lived experience) what is in reality purely arbitrary.⁵⁴ The I of memory can only state itself as what it is not, that is, as a symbolic catalyst of temporally disjunct experiences, in order to sustain the illusion of a transcendental bridging of experiential instances. We encounter here a tension between the wilful advent of memories and the spontaneous retrieval of hypothetical inner, 'lived' experiential contents. Rainer Nägele's words acquire a relevant inflection in the context of the above: "*Erfahrung* [in Baudelaire] is laid bare as *Erlebnis*. Yet it is the gesture of laying bare the *Erlebnis* without any borrowed robe of *Erfahrung* that gives the *Erlebnis* the weight of *Erfahrung*".⁵⁵ Baudelaire's uniqueness consists in the fact that he rendered obvious the transparency of inner experience (non-mediated by consciousness in its inceptive moment, allegedly recuperable through the agency of correspondences, the experience of non-volitional memory, of *Erfahrung*) to the meaning-disintegrating material inscription of a memorisation (*Gedächtnis*) that has to forget its content in order to sustain itself in the form of *Erlebnis*. The

[Bergsonian] *durée* from which death has been eliminated has the miserable endlessness of a scroll. Tradition is excluded from it. It is the quintessence of a passing moment that struts about in the borrowed garb of experience."

⁵⁴ See Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," 770: "As we saw, the I, in its freedom from sensory determination, is originally similar to the sign. Since, however, it states itself as what it is not, it represents as determined a relationship to the world that is in fact arbitrary, that is to say, it states itself as a symbol. To the extent that the I points to itself, it is a sign, but to the extent that it speaks of anything but itself, it is a symbol. The relationship between sign and symbol, however, is one of mutual obliteration; hence the temptation to confuse and to forget the distinction between them."

⁵⁵ Rainer Nägele, "Poetic Ground Laid Bare: Benjamin Reading Baudelaire," in *Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions*, ed. David Ferris (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 138.

agenda of correspondences transparently translates, in de Man's words, a philosophy of internalisation of "*Er-innerung* as the ground of the aesthetic as well as the historical consciousness. *Erinnerung*, recollection as the inner gathering and preserving of experience, brings history and beauty together in the coherence of the system."⁵⁶ The utter negativity of the aesthetic and historical experience voiced in the poetry of Baudelaire emanates from his confronting the collapse of the socio-symbolic order, and from the melancholia with which he faced, and, I argue, welcomed, the reduction of meaning to vacant rhetorical gesturality. The impact of Baudelaire's poetry is partly due to his deployment of ironic allegory in order to render visible the reducibility of inner experience to sense-indifferent material inscription. This reduction is revealed in the particular quality of Baudelaire's mnemonic scenes that frame the narrativel conflicts, that is, their abrupt character, distortional imagery and figural excess. It is also evident in the latter's capacity to engulf the "main" information and divest it of experiential coherence and/or a putative commensurability to phenomenal reality ("Le Balcon" comes to mind here).

The same logic impels the defensive character of Baudelairean beauty that is revealed through its marmoreal character and susceptibility to metamorphoses ("Les Métamorphoses du vampire" and "La Beauté" are two characteristic instances of this ingrained instability). Beauty shapes up with intensely material attributes in distinction to a long tradition of aesthetic poetry that translates it in primarily ethereal/transcendental terms. Beauty in Baudelaire is made to sustain and codify the shock over the realisation that language is "unable to give a

⁵⁶ De Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," 771.

foundation to what it posits except as an intent of consciousness.”⁵⁷ This is the meaning that its transitoriness embraces. As such it comes to uphold a mediatory role. The funereal beauty that “La Beauté” depicts has lost all the plasticity of human life: The rupture of an ideal content that would be uncontaminated by material inscription is here put into relief.

Je suis belle, ô mortels! Comme un rêve de pierre,
 Et mon sein, où chacun s'est meurtri tour à tour,
 Est fait pour inspirer au poète un amour
 Éternel et muet ainsi que la matière. (OC I: 21)

I am beautiful, O mortals! Like a dream in stone,
 And my breast, on which many a man has bruised himself,
 Is made to inspire in the poet a love
 Eternal and silent like matter.

Beauty turns into soulless matter and thus condenses the antinomy of every content that must lose its ideality at the very moment it becomes materially expressible. In other terms, it metaphorises the text's own abnegation of the *Abgrund*, the non-foundation that subtends it. Additionally, it is the shock over the unassimilability of modern experience that is relevant here. The facticity of inner experience that Baudelaire engages in his bracketing critique of the imperatives of organic *Erinnerung* points to his acute awareness of the split between socio-symbolic and imaginary registers underlying the *Erlebnis/Erfahrung* divide. It also ramifies into the zero-degree referentiality that his tactics of metonymic seriality and contentless intensification instantiate.

⁵⁷ Paul de Man, "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," in *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 6. Cynthia Chase refers to and rephrases this point in "Getting Versed," 134.

“Le Balcon,” “L'Horloge”: fabricated memories and the female body

Cynthia Chase contends that in “Le Soleil” the difference between metaphor and metonymy breaks down and what we are left with is the display of a power of signification that exceeds the play of tropes. The power to assemble lists is materialised here, as in the case where memorisation archives its trophies/souvenirs. It is especially in the *Spleen* poems that enumerative metonymic series are more evident. In Eugene Holland’s words: “instead of invoking the metaphoric axis of remembrance, spleen intensification invokes the metonymic axis of seriality.”⁵⁸ In “Le Balcon” these themes assume clearer contours in a way that explicitly links a problematic of temporality with that of the function of memory. A chronological confusion from the very beginning of the poem accentuates the ambiguity between the present and the possible remembrance of a scene.

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,
Ô toi, tous mes plaisirs! Ô toi, tous mes devoirs!
Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,
La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs,
Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses! (OC I:
36).

Mother of memories, lover of lovers,
You who are all my pleasure! All my obligations!
You will remember the beauty of caresses,
The warmth of the hearth and the charm of evenings,
Mother of memories, lover of lovers!

The employment of the future tense, “tu te rappelleras, [you will remember]” adds to the chronological confusion in a way pregnant with implications regarding the

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Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 133.

anamnestic act. J.-D. Hubert thinks of the *destinatrice* as a “catalyseur mnémonique” and proceeds by focalising the peculiar dialectic of the perceived external world and the intensified sensations –in this case the sensation of smell, which has been connected with the agency of correspondences.⁵⁹ However, “Je croyais respirer le parfum de ton sang [I thought I was inhaling the aroma of your blood]” inscribes this interplay within an effort at overcoming the boundaries separating nature from consciousness. This overcoming is impossible, however, and the mode of its postulation is transparent to this awareness. Moreover, as Hubert writes apropos of the phrase “Que l’espace est profond!”, “en approfondissant [both in the appreciation of the aggrandissement of space and the intensification of sensation] on crée des souvenirs ou bien on les retrouve [by going into previous life one creates memories or retrieves them].”⁶⁰ The difference, however, between retrieving and creating memories is enormous. It partakes of the difference between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. The gap between the two realms precludes to a significant extent the consolidation of a historically viable *Erinnerung*. Occluding the difference amounts to an act of mystification. The last two strophes of the poem encapsulate the whole problematic.

Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses,
 Et revis mon passé blotti dans tes genoux.
 Car à quoi bon chercher tes beautés langoureuses
 Ailleurs qu’en ton cher corps et qu’en ton coeur si
 doux?
 Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses!

Ces serments, ces parfums, ces baisers infinis,
 Renaîtront-ils d’un gouffre interdit à nos sondes,

⁵⁹ J. -D. Hubert, *L’Esthétique des “Fleurs du Mal”*: *Essai sur l’ambiguïté* (Genève: Pierre Cailler, 1953), 180-1.

⁶⁰ Hubert, *L’Esthétique*, 181.

Comme montent au ciel les soleils rajeunis
Après s'être lavés au fond des mers profondes?
--Ô serments! Ô parfums! Ô baisers infinis! (OC I: 37).

I know the art of evoking happy moments,
And live my past again nestled at your knees.
For what would it avail to seek your languorous beauty
Elsewhere rather than in your beloved body and tender
heart?
I know the art of evoking happy moments!

These vows, these perfumes, the infinite kisses,
Will they be reborn out of an abyss where no ~~sound~~ ^{probing}
Ever penetrates, Like reborn suns traversing the sky
After being purified in the depths of bottomless seas?
O vows! perfumes! Infinite kisses!

Hubert comments as follows: "There seems to be a conflict between the non-reversibility of time and the return of memories which can only be mitigated by poetic creation. We do not know whether the abyss remains inaccessible to ~~sound~~ ^{probing} because the past cannot return or because poetic memory is involuntary by nature --and therefore must be awaited."⁶¹ The uneasy co-integration of the irreversibility of time and the process of retrieving memories coincides temporally with the "vows," the "perfumes," the "infinite kisses," and the narrator's nestling in the woman's body in the midst of a questioning of the possibility of the memories ever returning in the same form. This questioning indirectly echoes that of the feasibility of retrieving memories to the extent that woman is construed as a vehicle through which the anamnestic act comes to be consummated. This way memory is seen to be contingent, extrinsically determined and materially mediated. The corporeal mediation of remembrance in and through the female body accords well with the intercalation of the natural dimension that appears in

⁶¹ Hubert, *L'Esthétique*, 182.

the form of the sun with its beauty and warmth, the profundity of space, and the intensification of sensation evinced through the paradoxical “respirer le parfum de ton sang.” “Le Balcon” blurs the distinction between natural and mental processes while at the same time maintaining the dividing line between them. At the same time, the temporal instability already mentioned along with the revelation of the facticity and non-naturality of memory retrieval (“Je sais *l’art d’évoquer* les minutes heureuses”) point to a condition wherein both memories and natural things are wilfully invested with significance instead of being regarded as inherently meaningful. The indirect awareness that seems to be gradually crystallising is that of an immanent tension between the immediacy of nature (the profundity of space, the warmth of the sun) and the mediate character of memory retrieval (through the mediation of the woman's physical presence). This is an awareness that depletes the pseudo-conjunction of the natural and the mental dimensions that is imparted as a first impression. The putative immediacy of memory can only be affirmed negatively under the sign of a remembrance triggered through, and nestling in, the other's body. Therefore, its fulfilment is inherently abortive and intra-textually acknowledged as such. Baudelaire inscribes the process of memorisation in the language of natural process and reinscribes the language of natural process in a discourse designating an activity that is instantiated within the symbolic chora and therefore eludes natural determinations. The anamnestic labour is bound to be represented as natural *by necessity*. The whole endeavour tries to ground memory and language in the sphere of perception.⁶² “Le Balcon” can be seen as one of a series of poems

⁶² The whole analysis of “Le Balcon” is indebted to Cynthia Chase's corresponding discussion of “Le Soleil” in “Getting Versed: Reading Hegel with Baudelaire,” 131-2. Cynthia

negatively engaging the relation between phenomenalist cognition, memory retrieval and/or fabrication and, by extension, reference.

The metaphoric axis of remembrance is invoked in the poem only to be undermined by the indirect revelation of the facticity and materiality of the reminiscing process which comes to be mediated by the woman's body. Knowing the *art of evoking* happy memories collapses the recuperation of inner experience to a wilful *Erlebnis* operation that itemises and serialises *souvenirs*. This must be borne in mind whenever an attempt is made at elucidating an operation that consists in the fabrication of screen memories disguised as products of genuine retrieval. This process is not exceptional and its factitiousness is revealed when it is counterpointed to remembrances that flare up in a context of crisis.⁶³ Freud at some stage held the view that *all* memories are screen memories, "screens which it makes no sense to look behind in search of the 'original, primal' trace."⁶⁴ The remembered event is entirely free of empirical moorings, and is never sufficient in itself. This is what "Le Balcon" exemplifies.

Holland emphasises the fact that during the programme of "recuperation through memory of an integral self mystically linked to a supernatural world, the

Chase transcribes de Man's views on the mystificatory character of all programmes aiming at collapsing language to an attribute of perception in a way that, when it comes to concrete readings of literary texts as is the case here, can only be described as highly productive. In no way does her continuous connection with de Man imply her reduction to the mere status of an epigone.

⁶³ I am alluding to Benjamin's Thesis VI: "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 247). This monadic, rupturous memory does not upset the fixity of the past only through the epiphanic juxtaposition of primal events and their truth, but also through the dissolution of the past *in* the present "so that the future becomes (once again) an *open question*" (Forrester, *Seductions of Psychoanalysis*, 206).

⁶⁴ Forrester, *Seductions of Psychoanalysis*, 205. See "Screen memories," in Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, coll. Anna Freud, 24 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-74), vol. 3, 304-22.

figure of woman predominates.”⁶⁵ I cannot follow the psychoanalytic trajectory that legitimises his statement here, but can only concur with the empirically verifiable reality of his observations to the effect that the female body/presence seems to be the mediating vessel *par excellence* when it comes to all (always abortive) attempts at a self-retrieval via memorisation. The female body functions as the chora wherein the conflict between naturality and artificiality is played out. This conflict is never instantiated in the mode of dialectical successivity but in that of simultaneity. As such it defies resolution.

Memory and temporality are mutually imbricated in “L’Horloge,” as well, a poem that instantiates what Holland calls the “decoding of subjectivity.”⁶⁶ It is organised around the inter-containment of multiple prosopopoeiae to the effect that “the Second” and “Now” address the protagonist from within the central quotation serving as the backbone of the poem and reproducing the address of the clock.

“Trois mille six cents fois par heure, la Seconde
 Chuchote: *Souviens-toi!* –Rapide, avec sa voix
 D’insecte, Maintenant dit: Je suis Autrefois,
 Et j’ai pompé ta vie avec ma trompe immonde! (OC
 I: 81)

“Three thousand and six hundred times an hour,
 The Second whispers: *Remember!* Swift,
 With its insect’s voice, Now says: I am already
 Other,
 And I have drained your life with my hideous
 suckers!

Holland rightly contends that this way the text “effectively underscores its own rhetorical figure *mise en abîme*, as if to make it more legible.”⁶⁷ Baudelaire’s

⁶⁵ Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 178.

⁶⁶ Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 104

⁶⁷ Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 105.

strategy whereby a tropological awareness implodes the naturality of conjunctions intratextually is evident here. Holland's analysis of the poem focuses on the allegorical vicissitudes of the personification of the timepiece. The questioning of the allegorical figure's status is taken up by the rhetorical mode in which the attribute "doigt [finger]" can be seen to refer either to the finger of the "dieu sinistre," the time-god, or to the pawl of the clock itself.

Horloge! dieu sinistre, effrayant, impassible,
Dont le doigt nous menace et nous dit: "*Souviens-toi!*
Les vibrantes Douleurs dans ton coeur plein d'effroi
Se planteront bientôt comme dans une cible; (OC I: 81)

Clock! Sinister god, terrifying, impassive,
Whose finger threatens us and says: "*Remember!*
Throbbing Sadness will implant itself inside your
Terrified heart as if striking a target.

We encounter here an ambivalent personification and an allegory of admonition. The latter is finally seen to evoke the force of memory because of its syntactical deployment and not because of its semantic content. "*Souviens-toi*" is not an imperative of memory, an inducement to remember, but a reminder of the ego-dismantling and memory-dispersing agency of time.

"*Souviens-toi* que le Temps est un joueur avide
Qui gagne sans tricher, à tout coup! c'est la loi.
Le jour décroît; la nuit augmente; *souviens-toi!*
Le gouffre a toujours soif; la clepsydre se vide.
(OC I: 81)

Remember that Time is an avid gambler
Who wins without cheating at every turn! It's the
law.
The day is waning; night spreads; *remember!*
The abyss is always thirsty; the clepsydre runs
dry.

It is interesting that in this case *le gouffre* [abyss, pit, chasm] is explicitly associated with time. The wealth of spatio-temporal resonances that this term carries have given it a prominent place in Baudelaire's topography wherein it has encased the tensions inherent in the poetry's treatment of the ethical dimension *more geometrico*.⁶⁸ The explicitness with which it is linked to time in this case is particularly illuminating.

Holland argues that "far from successfully resuscitating memory or even recommending the attempt, the poem warns of the inevitable defeat of memory by time, instead. The descriptive passages intercalated between the repeated command to 'remember' thus appear not as motives of recalling the past, but as so many features of what it is that needs always to be kept in mind: time is an avid gambler who wins without cheating, 'à tout coup!' (l.18) –at every stroke (of the clock), at every throw (of the dice) ..."⁶⁹ Therefore, what is thematised through the deployment of the allegorical mode is the "categorical rejection of memory and of the prospect of recuperating the identity of self metaphorically by reuniting past and present." What is evinced is the awareness and allegorisation of an "eclipse of memory and integral subjectivity"⁷⁰ that contains within it in a sublimative mode the defensive intensification of things and sensations and an echo of the thrills of evilification. Within the enclosure of Baudelaire's psychopoetics

⁶⁸ Guilt in Baudelaire's poetry is often articulated through images of ascent and fall. There is nothing new or radical in that. However, the continuous reversals of moral values point to a logic of structurally preserving moral equilibria irrespective of their content (see especially the *Révolte* section [OC I: 121-5]). Morality in Baudelaire is postural. It serves as the terrain whereupon the imbrication of moral imperatives and political asymmetry is brought to relief.

⁶⁹ Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 106-7.

⁷⁰ Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 106-7.

this containment manages to synthesise several tension-ridden themes into a discursive ensemble whose uneasy yet balanced coexistence of kernels cannot but point to an exceptional degree of critical and aesthetic awareness.

CHAPTER FIVE

"LE CYGNE": THE MUTUAL UNDERMINING OF HISTORY AND MEMORY

There is a first, or an early moment which is unique, of shock and surprise, even of terror ... a moment which can never be forgotten, but which is never repeated integrally; and yet which would become destitute of significance if did not survive in a larger whole of experience.

T. S. Eliot, "Dante"

I: Infinitisation of the mnemonic trajectory

The coexistence of an allegorical mode of content organisation and the treatment of memory as a macro-theme underlies "Le Cygne" and renders it apposite to the preceding discussion. In Holland's words, socio-symbolic transformation triggers a "memory-based mode of recognition so central to the correspondences program."¹ The central concern around which the text is organised is the disjunction between voluntary and involuntary memory and whether its overcoming is feasible, meaningful or desirable. From the opening lines the allegorical signified "Le Cygne" is presented as part of an experience that integrates it as the relay of an anterior meaning. The recollection of an earlier scene in which a swan had escaped from its menagerie cage occurs within a framework positing the speaking subject in the temporal mode of the present. Gradually, and bearing in mind the shock-effect of the apostrophe that marks the beginning of the poem, an apostrophe pointing to a historical past, the text crystallises through a seriality of anteriorities.

Andromaque, je pense à vous! Ce petit fleuve,
Pauvre et triste miroir où jadis resplendit
L'immense majesté de vos douleurs de veuve,

¹ Eugene Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 158.

Ce Simoïs menteur qui par vos pleurs grandit,

A fecondé soudain ma mémoire fertile,
Comme je traversais le nouveau Carrousel.
Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville
Change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d'un
mortel); (OC I: 85).

Andromaque, I am thinking of you! This narrow stream,
Insignificant sad mirror where once shone
The immense majesty of your widow's sadness,
This false Simoïs that swells by your tears,

Has suddenly enriched my fertile memory,
As I was crossing the new Carrousel.
Old Paris is no more (a city's form
Changes, alas, faster than a mortal's heart);

Nathaniel Wing writes about the analeptic character of this narrative wherein an earlier scene, that of the swan, is intercalated and interrelated to the allegorical signified Andromaque.² The supposedly fertile memory upon which the allegorical *relais* can be deployed is gradually depicted as being unable to contain the rapidly metamorphosing landscape of Paris. It is admitted from the beginning that memory cannot keep pace with the accelerating rhythms of urban metamorphosis, therefore is unable to accommodate one of the primary parameters of modern experience, that is, mutability. It is exactly this inability which resonates with the problematics of the voluntary/involuntary nature of memory. The haphazard character of the associational trajectory that characterises non-volitional recall, and the laborious nature of remembrance distinguishing conscious recollection, address unsuccessfully the transformation of contents and

² Nathaniel Wing, "The Danaides Vessel: On Reading Baudelaire's Allegories," in *The Limits of Narrative: Essays on Baudelaire, Flaubert, Rimbaud and Mallarmé* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 14.

the unhinging of historical referents guaranteed by temporality. Now, the serial acceleration of meaning³ accruing to the realisation that “tout pour moi devient allégorie” legitimises the hypothesis that what is involved here is not only what Wing underlines as “a radical loosening of the relationship between the signifier and signified, suggesting the terrifying possibility that any person, object or relationship can mean absolutely anything.” I believe that the overdetermination of the allegorical mode of conceiving reality implies by extension the disanchoring of the anamnestic faculty from the metaphorical network that is supposed to ground and bind the associations between present stimuli and memory-grids. A rhetorical instance of this disanchored memory is that of “Un vieux Souvenir [qui] sonne à plein souffle du cor! [An old memory that winds its horn]” in the midst of a “forêt [forest]” where the narrator’s spirit is “exiled.” It is impossible to stabilise the permeation of the verbal unit *je pense à* by a potential *je me souviens de*. Thought shades off into memory and memory to the fabrication of scenic fragments triggered by an empathetic need for identification, a need that, as will be argued later on, has political implications. Nathaniel Wing summarises the reality of the metonymic seriality that the poem exhibits as a consequence of the intermeshing of conscious thought and memory as follows:

The supposedly rational, monosemic or polysemic figure [the figure of the negress, the orphans, the narrator’s memory, etc.] functions, then, in a curious and unsettling manner, to inscribe the predicament of a thought caught in an open and endless displacement. Poetic thought is no longer delimited by the semantic horizon of the allegorical signified; it breaks that horizon by the repetition of an endless continuity. Each allegorical figure reiterates the impossibility of retrieving a lost origin; the loss which is allegorized here is that which is always already absent. The “object” (“ce qui ne se retrouve jamais...”), moreover, is not easily compensated for by

³ See Wing, “The Danaides Vessel,” 15.

the language which figures its displacement, for language is here powerless to restore the plenitude of an original presence.⁴

Each allegorical figure reiterates the impossibility of binding the mnemonic referents in a symbolically sensible way. Recourse to memory enhances self-alienation through memory's relentless seriality and displacement of the *points-de repère* that would sediment the associative trajectory into a realm of recognisable and cohesively-bound contents. Holland, apropos of the Andromaque invocation, contends that "the Poet's memory appears here not as agent but as a direct object, suddenly fertilized by Andromaque's little river. The Poet remains undecidably as much the object as the subject of these thoughts in the explanation offered later in the poem: 'Aussi devant ce Louvre une image m'opprime: / Je pense à mon grand cygne.../...et puis à vous,/Andromaque...'"⁵ A logic of mutual inflection of its constitutive parts governs the whole sequence wherein the intercalation of allegorical *microrécits* contributes to the lingering sense of self-alienation. Memory is the main agent of these alienating effects since it operates in the wake of the incapacitation of the metaphoric axis that could bind its contents and gear its effects toward the recoding of socio-symbolic experience. The experience of a rapidly changing Paris cannot be commensurate with a cumulative series of memory chains.

I argue that the signified swan elaborates upon the incessant pursuit of meaning within a framework of allegorical representation. In the first chapter I stressed the visibility of the arbitrariness characterising the relation of the allegorical poles. The facticity and non-naturality of the allegorical trajectory

⁴ Wing, "The Danaïdes Vessel," 15.

⁵ Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 159; original emphasis.

constitute an integral part of every allegorical “theme” and testify to an enhanced semiological awareness ingrained in the trope. Timothy Bahti chronicles the particular character of this allegory as perceived by Hans Robert Jauss as follows: “Instead of the allegorical representation of a prior, or better, a *timeless* truth within or through reality --the Platonic tradition of allegory-- the allegorical imagery is here in a negative or discordant relation to its significance, inverting allegorical truth into a self-referential sense of lost significance and, together with this, inverting worldly representation into the representation of its absence.”⁶ The swan allegorises the loss of denominational control. What his reproaches to God instantiate (“Comme s’il ad~~ress~~ait des reproches à Dieu! [As if he reproached God himself]”) is “the ethical language of persuasion [that] has to act upon a world that it no longer considers structured like a linguistic system but that consists of a system of *needs*.”⁷ The fact that the source of this pursuit of memory and meaning assumes the form of an animal (the swan) relates to the internal link of this demand with the ideology of need that connects it directly to naturality. The muteness of the bird, on the one hand, reinforces the pathos with which this demand is usually articulated whereas, on the other hand, it undermines the equation between naturality and language that is the common topos behind the putative inevitability of the referential dimension. In distinction to an economy of metaphorical naturality (*vide* correspondences) “allegory speaks out with the

⁶ Timothy Bahti, *Allegories of History: Literary Historiography after Hegel* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 213. Bahti summarises approvingly Hans Robert Jauss’ contentions in *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*, vol. I (Munich: W. Fink, 1977), 295-342.

⁷ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), 209.

referential efficacy of a *praxis*.”⁸ Praxis should be understood here in the sense of an act that incorporates the awareness of its conjunctural, arbitrary and consensual character. In “Le Cygne” the praxial and disjunctive character of the allegorical articulation is rendered readable through the textual schematisation of the disruptive intertwining of trope and persuasion in the form of the errant bird. “[T]out pour moi devient allégorie” recapitulates the already apparent agency of the trope whereas the errancy of the swan makes a scene of the system of needs that underlies the ethical language of persuasion (the swan’s reproaches). The whole itinerary is sustained in the temporal mode of simultaneity, and not as a succession of conflicting moments. The trope must be entwined with the language of need if it is to be staged at all. There is no moment of ultimate synthesis, however, since the relation is neither dialectical nor serially temporal. Within this framework the tension between retrieving the essence of (past) experience and the disintegration of experiential and mnemonic contents through the allegorical staging of this experience organises the text.

“Le Cygne” II: metafigural awareness

Concerning the issue of memory, Eugene Holland writes apropos of “Le Jeu” and “Le Cygne” that “there, the Poet cannot simply subscribe to meaning and memory, since they are decoded [i.e., dissolved], but cannot entirely abandon them either: they are transformed by the supplement of melancholy, which generates the multiple allegories of exile comprising part II of the poem.”⁹ Baudelaire’s melancholy, however, is not the negative indicator of a nostalgia for

⁸ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 208.

⁹ Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 169.

what was once there but has now succumbed to adverse conjunctures. Nor is it sustained by an immutable subjectivity as a bearer of the abject experience. The transparency of an ideally retrievable lived experience to non-testimonial memory-chains inevitably leads to the evacuation of a subjectivity that unfolds co-extensively with the anamnestic act. The supplement of melancholy is called upon to reconstitute an affective pseudo-cohesion of the self.¹⁰ It combines with figures of love and sexuality and the languages of affection and trauma which in Baudelaire include their own mortification. Melancholia is the binding condition that puts love, sex, and affection into relief, together with the phoney presumptuousness of need that the memory of the swan stages only in order to simultaneously disperse.

“Le Cygne” belabours the impossibility of memory as metaphor of experience in the context of an errancy and displacement of perceptual and mnemonic givens. The text can stage this errancy while containing a metafigural awareness indicated by “tout pour moi devient allégorie.” While the bankruptcy of a metaphorical grounding of memory is thematised, the demand for it is voiced through the language of pathos and is attributed to the swan’s reproach. The text contrasts two ways of eliciting the essence of memory, a metaphorical and an allegorical one, while at the same time registering the difficulty, or impossibility, of opting for one of the two in a way that would leave no residue of ambiguity. This difficulty is staged “by means of a distinction that corresponds to the difference between metaphor and metonymy, necessity and chance being a legitimate way to distinguish between analogy and contiguity. The inference of

¹⁰ See Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 19: “Indeed, sadness reconstitutes an affective cohesion of the self, which restores its unity within the framework of the affect.”

identity and totality that is constitutive of metaphor is lacking in the purely relational metonymic contact.”¹¹ Finally, the text can be seen as staging the failure of memory and metaphoric recognition when it comes to distilling meaning from the rapidly metamorphosing urban *tableaux*. In Holland’s words, “The rejection of nature in favour of artifice leads to anxiety-based recognition, but decoded recognition [a recognition whose framework of perceptual commonality has been shattered] fails to find meaning in the street scenes.”¹² The “Tableaux parisiens” will register the introvert move toward domestic scenes ensuing upon the aforementioned failure and the subsequent focusing upon desire as the means of meaning-encoding.¹³

Ross Chambers’ analysis of “Le Cygne” links the themes of memory, temporality, and melancholia in a fecund way especially since he relates all the above to a problematisation of referentiality.¹⁴ The immersion into memory and melancholia is seen by Chambers to be an endemic trait of the modern subject and symptomatic of a historical conjuncture.¹⁵ Memory lies at the origin of the

¹¹ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 14, apropos of a passage in Proust where the preference of metaphor over metonymy is supposed to be a given. He then proceeds to demonstrate the vulnerability of this avowed preference and the self-contradictory character of the disclosure that gives it voice. In the case of “Le Cygne” it has already been argued that no such preference is offered as a starting point. Yet de Man’s analysis is particularly apposite to this discussion because of the relevance of the conceptual categories he deploys and the associations he establishes between them.

¹² Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 166.

¹³ See the introductory poem, “Paysage,” correctly translated by Francis Scarfe as “Townscape” (OC I: 82/ CV I: 169). The city of Paris is observed from the interior of an attic. The poem sets the conceptual angle from which the rest of the tableaux set off. The enabling enclosure within this interior space is affirmed in the concluding lines: “Et quand viendra l’hiver aux neiges monotones, / Je fermerai partout portières et volets / Pour bâtir dans le nuit mes féeriques palais [And when winter comes with its monotonous snows, / I will close all doors and shutters / To build my nocturnal fairy palaces].” See Benjamin, “Konvolut I: The Interior, the Trace,” in *The Arcades Project*, 212-227, for a thorough analysis of the meaning of this enclosure. It is seen therein as a trait of characteristic bourgeois inwardness in the face of social conflict.

¹⁴ See Ross Chambers, “Mémoire et Mélancolie,” in *Mélancolie et Opposition: les débuts du modernisme en France* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1987), 167-186.

¹⁵ Chambers, “Mémoire et Mélancolie,” 176.

melancholic experience and it is within this framework that the textual determination of it as “fertile” acquires a particular, and ironic, significance. The historicist undertones of Chambers’ rationale are gradually revealed as he moves from the realisation of the false epiphany and pseudo-euphoria accompanying the intertwining of the “double souvenir” (that of Andromaque and the swan) to the understanding of the enabling conditions of Baudelaire’s strategies. Apropos of the counterpoint between “Le coeur d’un mortel [The heart of a mortal]” and the rapid changes of nineteenth-century Paris, and their mutual submission to temporality and death, Chambers writes that “this gap between man and his material environment is embarrassing in itself since it comes to wall in the subject in his heart and spirit (“I see only in my mind’s eye this complex of huts”), in the sense that it alienates him from the material and social forms of culture --if this is what is implied by the word ‘city’-- whose transmutations are a manifestation of history.”¹⁶ These observations are paradigmatic of a critical methodology that combines rhetorical with historical awareness. It underscores, at the same time, the self-reflexive character of the texts in question as much as integrates an awareness of the historical denominators at play. They will serve as the bridge to the discussion of the overtly political analyses of Richard Terdiman, who seems to have exhausted the terrain of the historico-political determinations of the Baudelairean poetry while exhibiting a rare sensitivity to the rhetorical exigencies of the texts and their inner laws of development. In his own way, he also seems to affirm that memory is *de facto* implicated whenever the understanding of broader historical contexts is involved.

¹⁶ Chambers, “Mémoire et Mélancolie,” 178; original translations throughout.

"Le Cygne" III: exilic memory and the ruination of experience

According to Ross Chambers the power which is supposed to fecundate memory in "Le Cygne" derives from a temporal mode which ingrains all three of the principal figural syntagmata ("je", Andromaque, the swan) with a post-lapsarian negativity. They follow upon a temporal caesura [*coupure*]: Andromaque as the victim of the destruction of Troy, "je" as submitting to the effects of a reconstruction of Paris that has already started. In Chambers' words: "Therefore, if fertile memory seems at first sight to be a means of transcending the temporal caesura from which suffers the present, it also reveals itself to *confirm this caesura* by producing the figures that evoke a time when either the fall was already consummated (the case of Andromaque) or change was already on the way (the case of the swan)."¹⁷ An exilic memory is affirmed through the invocation of the historico-mythical figure (Andromaque) and the poetic narrator's recollection of the errant bird. This memory cuts across, as Chambers concludes, the production of sense and the construction of identity as much as it underscores the negativity permeating a putatively fecund memory. He specifies the workings of remembrance in terms of an attempt at containing the entropic disruptive force of time.¹⁸ Besides, the poetic text itself is interspersed with terms that connote not the overcoming of temporality but a labour within time. Terms such as "tombeau vide [cenotaph]," or the "échafaudage [scaffolding]," with their resonances of spatial cavity and profundity, are negative markers of the

¹⁷ Chambers, "Mémoire et Melancolie," 179.

¹⁸ See Chambers, "Mémoire et Melancolie," 179-80.

groundlessness of temporality.¹⁹ Baudelaire frequently resorts to the stratagem of deploying spatial and temporal categories in such a way as to have them supplement, illuminate and/or undermine one another.

As regards the temporality which is indirectly visible in the vocabulary of amorphous and profound space and in the interstices between flash-back memories, and the particular undercurrents that it assumes in the framework of the voiding of mnemonic and historical contents, Keith Ansell-Pearson's words apropos of Deleuze's expounding of an ordinal/intensive time²⁰ can by association shed some light on it. Ansell-Pearson thinks of it as "a form of time which introduces into being a revelation of the formless, the order of chaos and metamorphosis, and in which the ground of time (memory) is superseded by 'a universal ungrounding which turns upon itself and causes only the yet-to-come to return ('effondement universel qui tourne en lui-même et ne fait revenir que l'avenir')." ²¹ The examined texts challenge us to rethink this intensive time, or this intensive experience of time,²² in the context of the traditional, and dysfunctional, demand that memory act as a systemic, and essentially historical,

¹⁹ See Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press), 193-94: "[Time is not] a succession of present instances that derive from a continuous flux and that, as a result of their plenitude, allow us to perceive the thickness of the past and the outline of a future in which they in turn become the past.... [Time] recurs as singular difference; and the analogous, the similar, and the identical never recur. Difference recurs."

²⁰ Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Germinal Life: The difference and repetition of Deleuze* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 103.

²¹ Ansell-Pearson, *Germinal Life*, 103; citing from Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 91.

²² Foucault calls it "convoluted time," the same way Benjamin does ["Theatrum Philosophicum," 193]. See Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," 206: "The eternity which Proust opens to view is convoluted time, not boundless time. His true interest is in the passage of time in its more real --that is, space-bound-- form, and this passage nowhere holds sway more openly than in remembrance within and ageing without. To observe the interaction of ageing and remembering means to penetrate to the heart of Proust's world, to the universe of convolution."

metaconsciousness. The temporality that subtends an experience that has succumbed to a relentless metonymic *relais* cannot be harnessed to the stringing out of moments in a horizontal succession of experiential grids. The contractile force of memory vis-à-vis time is a given. However, what one encounters in “Le Cygne” is not a simple contraction of the temporal realm accompanied by a sampling of essentially interconnected experiential and temporal cores. The hysterical leaps of thought from one semantic terrain to another without any apparent common denominator but that of loss and exile, are indicative of a time experience of sheer intensity yet no duration in the classical sense of the term. The matrices do not cohere into an experiential ensemble that can be objectified by consciousness nor do they unfold as a sequence of related or even randomly communicating events.

The impression of successivity that emanates from the narrative is the outcome of the unavoidable organisation of discourse in terms of diachrony. The text struggles to communicate the undoing of this successivity and its correlative temporality in the mode of a schizoid abandonment to random metonymy. From “Je pense à la négresse, amaigrie et phthisique [I think of the negress, famished and phthisic]” to “À quiconque a perdu ce qui ne se retrouve / Jamais, jamais! [To whomever has lost what will never be found again / Never, never]” to “Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans une île / Aux captifs, aux vaincus! ... à bien d'autres encor! [I think of the sailors forgotten on a desert island / The captive ones, the vanquished! ... and so many more!],” one encounters the itinerary of a thought that cannot track its referents back to a cognizing consciousness. It can no more enchain them to experiential crucibles that can achieve historical or

personological recognition. The text is not organised around the traditional logic of the evolution of binomial series of consciousness referents and reality gives engaged reciprocally. The narratorial voice(s) fail to entrench the intractable reality-*aperçus* into a cognitively domesticated realm. There is a crisis of evidentiality here to which the dispersive fragments of thematised experience testify. The logic of their relatability is dissensual, which is different from simply admitting the polyvocal character of the narrative. The latter is a common topos of literary modernity and as such even overflows to texts that aim to conflate consciousness and reality in a harmonious symmetry of forces. There is nothing special or intrinsically radical in polyvocality in itself. In this case, however, it is coterminous with the grafting of experiential contents onto a metonymic randomness and singularity that turns every referent into an *hapax logomenon* (absolutely singular, non-referential, non-signifying, literally "only once said"). The intractable grids of experience do not gravitate towards an over-arching consciousness that could synthesise them into a historically or egologically appropriated posited content. The radical destratification of these crucibles imperils their cognitive working through.

The clogging up of cognitive appropriation is belaboured in exemplary fashion in "Les Sept Vieillards," a poem that construes reality in terms of the eternal return of the same. No explanatory framework can help the narrator make sense of what he perceives as an endless procession of identical yet void of substance hideous figures. It is this absence of an encasing framework of value that equally jeopardises the passage from perception to cognition in "Le Cygne," yet this absence is never imbued with the positive valorisation of something once

fully owned and therefore potentially retrievable in the future. Baudelaire's melancholia is not the negative indicator of a nostalgic consciousness that desires the blockage of temporal dispersion, and the stasis of cognitive saturation. "Paris change! Mais rien dans ma mélancolie / N'a bougé! [Paris changes! But nothing has moved in my melancholy!]" points to the poet's reluctance to glorify memory. It is not the retention of what used to be that is signalled here by this "rien n'a bougé" but the refusal to let memory act as a reconciling agent of temporally distinct moments. The sublimity of exile is overtly affirmed in the following lines ["Je pense à mon grand cygne, avec ses gestes fous / Comme les exilés, ridicule et sublime"]. The ironic dimension endemic in the distancing from origin and history is also subtly present (in this "ridicule"), distance from self and other being an essential ingredient of irony itself.

The antinomian character of the text implodes a linear model of time. The Deleuzian temporality mentioned above, which can only be decontextualised and glimpsed momentarily at this stage, can be related to what Richard Terdiman has given a more historically-aware twist: a mnemonic crisis configured in terms of the non-integration of recollections with consciousness.²³ The question whether this is a degraded temporality determined by the exigencies of capitalism (Terdiman) or whether this experience of the time of *Abgrund* presupposes and accrues to the prior demystification and abandonment of essentialist conceptual categories (Deleuze, Foucault, de Man), is central to my elaboration of the poetry. I contend that Baudelaire struggled with the disintegration of experiential contents that the capitalist mode of societal organisation bequeathed to his generation

²³ Richard Terdiman, "Deconstructing Memory: Representing the Past and Theorising Culture in France since the Revolution," *Diacritics* 15 (winter 1985): 15.

within a distinctly French framework of social and ideological mobility that allowed for the understanding of social upheavals in political and historical terms. The melancholy nature of his poetry responds to the sedimentation of the market order and its devastating impact on large segments of the French society without, however, Baudelaire resorting to compensatory fictions of a pre-lapsarian state and an organismic socially-binding memory that would allegedly unite all social participants into meaningful and solidaristic totalities. The dispirited nature of his poetry responds to the impossibility of cementing a sense of self and experience in essentialist terms. This response cannot but impinge on the nature of the historical awareness that emanates from his narratives. Baudelaire combines an understanding of historical specificities with the welcoming affirmation of the dispersion of cognitive positing and historical grounding of experience. The recognition of loss in the midst of a historical-turned-phantasmagorical setting in "Le Cygne" affirms the perpetual slippage of historical frameworks into a constellation of loosely bound images unfettered from testimonial accountability.²⁴

There are no nostalgic traits in Baudelaire's poetry except as targets of critique. Utopian spaces are depicted as exotic *scenes* where aspirations, passions, and an eventual horror and disappointment over their social cancellation, are played off against one another.²⁵ The works exude mournful undertones over the

²⁴ Again Lacanian psychoanalysis is relevant here. See Lacan, "The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis," 48: "In psychoanalytic anamnesis, it is not a question of reality, but of truth, because the effect of full speech is to reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the little freedom through which the subject makes them present." Enhancing the primacy of the truth value of events that constitute part of one's history necessitates the bracketing of the dimension of its empirical verifiability and veracity. This is exactly what the examined text shows. The contingency of this value upon the preservation of personal or collective imaginaries becomes sharper.

²⁵ See "Le Voyage," OC I: 129-34.

disintegration of horizontal temporality without affirming its correlate calendar memory. Time is enemy to man yet even the correspondences agenda is acknowledged as being vulnerable to it. At the same time, there is a liberatory dimension inherent in this corrosive temporality. Time guarantees the non-commensurability of temporally disjunct experiences and breaks the psychological causality chains that perpetuate human suffering. Embracing the temporal dimension entails accepting the radical randomness and irreversibility of events. This randomness goes counter to the tyrannical causal enchainments that lie behind desperation. The Baudelairean ambivalence towards temporality is constitutively unresolvable.²⁶

An equally ambivalent understanding of recollection that aims to assert the power of involuntary memory to salvage experiential contents while acknowledging the fragile facticity of the remembered scenes is at play. This is the meaning of the attempted creation of lived experience (*Erfahrung*) out of the materials of voluntarily retrieved/constructed mechanical contents (*Erlebnis*). For Baudelaire, the impossible task of making poetry out of the elaboration of contents that had been registered more or less involuntarily after having eluded the protective shield of conscious filtering was assigned to him at a particular historical conjuncture when the anyway ambivalent contact with social reality was given an even more emphatic form of shock. Protection against the modern bombardment of visual-tactile and conceptual stimuli and the compulsive

²⁶ The same applies to death and finitude. See "La Mort des pauvres [The Death of the Poor]" [OC I: 126], where death is the great consoler. Death marks the irreversible rupture of the causality that brings suffering to the destitute. Much as it reads like a Christian-like eulogy of death as a portal to the other world, this poem is in league with the *Révolution* transmutation of values. Death consoles because it brings an end to prolonged pain and injustice, not because it opens the gates of heaven.

belabouring of contents distilled through experience, was the norm *against which* lyrical poetry could continue to be written. Baudelaire imbued this poetry with the cynicism and bitterness of one who struggles to affirm residual experience while registering the disintegration of socio-symbolic codes and, therefore, the weakening of the ability to process reality and distil experiential contents out of it. The ambivalent responsiveness and social awareness that his poetry exhibits testify to his irresolute relation to history, memory, and the hypothetical possibility of extricating some experiential potential out of them. This oscillation is a response to concrete historical conditions yet transcends in its potency of awareness the historicist containments that Terdiman, among others, would have us believe that the texts incur.

Richard Terdiman's cited essay is instrumental when it comes to situating the particular inflections that memory acquires in Baudelaire's work as theme or stratagem. Modernist investments in memory are seen by Terdiman to constitute climaxes in a long trajectory the inceptive moment of which he associates with Hegel. In a way the whole *Erfahrung/Erlebnis/Erinnerung* matrix discussed above is inherently potentiated and determined by the dynamics and constraints of the Hegelian noosphere. However, the mnemonic harmony that Terdiman equates with the dialectic of past and present leading to Hegelian Recollection is absent in the case of Baudelaire's modernity. According to Terdiman's schema, the Spirit's triumphant self-absorption at the end of History, the common topos of classical Idealism, the epiphanic harmonising of self and world, past and present, have

given way to a radical incommensurability of mind and (historical) reality and an irredeemable disjunction of past and present.²⁷

Terdiman seems to homogenise the polyvalence of the Hegelian reasoning apropos of memory/Recollection. This introduces a note of schematic facility into his exposé, which inevitably detracts from the overall rigour of his analyses. Alienation is a factor that is inherent in the processes of conceptualisation and memorisation in Hegel, and an understanding of the latter in terms of homogeneous operations without internal divisions may gloss over the complexity of the Hegelian mnemonic dynamic. In the light of all this it is relevant to note that the caesural memory engaged by Baudelaire can be discussed in categories that are not inimical to Hegel's vocabulary *a priori*.²⁸ I can only point to the relevance of this issue here.

Terdiman's schemas are invoked here with all these reservations in mind, and not as indisputable guiding lines. I must register my distance from the implicit value judgements that can be inferred from his work since he holds Baudelaire, and the poetic *avant-garde* in France in general, accountable for what he regards as a historically determined abstraction from the social being of man,

²⁷ See Terdiman, "Deconstructing Memory," 14 passim.

²⁸ It is relevant to note that Paul de Man's doctoral thesis on Mallarmé mobilised Hegelian concepts, or rather the whole thesis seems to move within Hegel's conceptual sphere. The whole issue is reducible to what kind of reading one makes of Hegel (especially the *Phenomenology*). Despite the antithetical stance employed by several branches of post-structuralist theory it is openly avowed or covertly assumed by leading philosophers and theorists that the current conceptual struggle with idealism, historicism, difference, is a labour *within*, and not simply against, Hegel's universe. This is not only due to the overwhelming inclusiveness of his philosophy, but also to the intrinsic nature of his project. See Paul de Man, "Mallarmé, Yeats, and the Romantic Predicament" (PhD diss., University of Harvard, 1960,); Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy. A Hegelianism without Reserve," in *Writing and Difference*, 251-77. Behind an understanding of Hegel that accommodates difference lie, of course, Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolyte. See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980) and Jean Hyppolyte, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

which he lumps under the term “aestheticism.” Terdiman fails to comprehend the social dimension behind this allegedly monological poetry and insists on its non-transitive character. Voicing a genuine historicist concern, he resists the notion of a meta-awareness that exceeds the boundaries of a specific historical era. However, the poetic self-reflexiveness that he regards as inimical to the historical understanding of one’s own enabling conditions constitutes a subtle interweaving of contestatory discourses (therefore historically aware of their own conjunctural positioning vis-à-vis hegemonic normativity) and a resistance to the implicit teleological finalism of all historicisms that ultimately aim to bind discourse exclusively to the propositional sphere. Baudelaire’s poetry is not aesthetic in the narrow sense. It neither hypostasises an independent consciousness (in either the phenomenological sense of the sovereign producer of meaning or that of a textual idealism that cancels historical contingency) nor advocates the primacy of a sovereign referent that would subdue human activity to a unidimensional empiricism. It accommodates, and here is another facet of Terdiman’s objection, an infinity of semiotic, psycholinguistic and, by the same token, social antagonisms that prefigures the Nietzschean notion of the perpetual clash and mutation of powers. In its resistance to referential and semiotic closure this poetry does not accord well with the conservation of what is dialectically preserved and overcome.

Baudelaire’s poetry can be seen as prefiguring themes and rhetorical tactics that put philosophical, literary, and historical continuity in question (the poetry of Celan, for example, and Adorno’s doubts as to the feasibility of culture after the crisis of experience culminating in the Shoah). It can equally be regarded

as part of a trajectory whose origin can archaeologically be traced back to the “beginning” of the Enlightenment. However, much as it is tempting to place Baudelaire within a horizontal literary history one must account for the fact that the collapse of experience to which his poetry responds problematises *retroactively* this linear history. The modern crisis of representation, the gap between perception and cognition that his poetic production enacts and responds to, cannot be reduced to mere symptoms of an otherwise untouchable historical infrastructure. The loss of experiential transmissibility that he works through has a direct bearing on the possibility of adhering to a developmental historicity. The poetry mandates that the relation between past and present be put under negotiation, if not erasure.

The *Spleen* cycle, particularly, chronicles the deterioration of linear memory in addition to the defensive measures deployed to counter this mnemonic collapse. Terdiman focuses on the complementarity of hypertrophic memory and an abortive reminiscing in a state of underdevelopment. He correctly determines “exorbitance” and a certain “catastrophization of memory” as the primary determinants of *Spleen*.²⁹ The “eclipse of memory and the renunciation of the lyric subject”³⁰ are explicitly elaborated upon whereas in the beauty/*idéal* poems, he believes, they underlie a tense dialectic of metaphoric correspondences and metonymic serialities with regard to anchoring the trajectory of desire. I partially concur with Terdiman with the proviso that the possibility of sustaining a lyrical subject harmonising its enunciation with its “inner self” through beautification is thematised by Baudelaire as inherently abortive and is subsumed under the project

²⁹ Terdiman, “Deconstructing Memory,” 16.

³⁰ Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 86.

of a formalist intensification that transpires at the expense of ideal content. This project aims at preserving the contours of referential discourse within the framework of a hollowing out of meaning and the deterioration of the socio-symbolic anchoring validating it. Terdiman has given the latter a chronological/historical index (the aggressive capitalism of mid-nineteenth France), which, I argue, fails to account for Baudelaire's refusal to affirm a prelapsarial era of mnemonic, temporal, and historical afflatus. My intention is not to affirm disproportionately the supra-historical dimensions of Baudelaire's poetry, or poetry as such, but to direct attention to the insight solicited by the poetry, namely that the voiding of experience imperils the very possibility of assigning historical indexes. Restricting this poetry to a reflexive response to contemporary contingencies glosses over its complexities in the interest of annexing it to a cognitively and historically familiar zone. The hermeneutic act that aims at this integratist cognitive equilibrium addresses its textual referents in the mode of constative appropriation. This mode is doubly inadequate in this case since it is the very feasibility of the hermeneutic endeavour that is explicitly called to task by the texts.

Setting off with the narrator's palindromic memory one ends up with "a series of imagistic memories that can know no anecdotal or narrative end: time, under the allegorical structure of ancient and modern, new and ever-the-same, will know no historical, *ex post facto* narrative construction, but rather only the iterative or repetitive 'je pense à,' with each thought being of the unchanging loss brought about by changing time."³¹ History in "Le Cygne" is presented in terms

³¹ Bahti, *Allegories of History*, 217.

of a non-recoverable, non-historicisable ever-retreating original (*ergo* the metonymic drive), which makes it impossible to achieve any safe vantage point from which history can be reconstituted as the recounting of once witnessed events.³² Historical experience remains unclaimed.³³

Intervallic memory instantiates a mode of *Andenken* that fails to transmute history's phantasmatic presences (Andromaque) into meaningful historical presences. With regard to this perpetual moratorium against history, Benjamin and Nietzsche converge in their stressing the traumatic underpinnings of recollection. "Only that which hurts *incessantly* is remembered" writes the latter, whereas the former affirms that "[a]nything about which one knows that one soon will not have it around becomes an image."³⁴ The suffering in question does not relate to the specific content of memory so much as to the nature of the mnemonic itinerary which is similar to the allegorical ascription of non-essence a representational import. "Le Cygne" recounts its discordant relation to its own significance, the internal chasm precluding the spilling over of the awareness of historical loss into a meta-awareness. The suffering in

³² Baudelairean memory, with its flash-back ruptures of experiential continua, bears down upon the notion of history as *anagnorisis/recognition* of an always absent scene. Eliot's *The Waste Land* can legitimately be read as a sceptical comment on the possibility of this recognition. Revisionist memory can serve as a critical model of historical understanding since both rely on, while the former belies, the possibility of witnessing and/or recapturing the essence of events *après-coup*. Memory underwrites, and inevitably voids, history as recognition of the empirically verifiable and teleologically preordained. The protocols of mnemonic emergency that the textual subjects deploy to override the alienating effects of fading essence bind the subjects' behaviour to a clique mentality that parades its own defensiveness. Their intervallic and censorious memory fails to articulate any essence of personal or collective encoding of experience.

³³ See Bahti, *Allegories of History*, 224: "Benjamin's *Gedächtnis* or *Andenken*, Baudelaire's "Je pense à," and Hegel's *Denken* are signs of holding on to loss in and as language that figurally means --and repeatedly, ceaselessly reminds of-- the loss of its meaning, even as historians and their narrative history would represent literally or historically the forgetting of this loss in an amnesia that calls itself a recovery."

³⁴ Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, 42; Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *Baudelaire*, 87.

question is not the exclusive property of a specific individual but frames empathy and imaginary identifications. Andromaque's mourning blends with the narrator's disenchantment in a peculiar grid of identifications that cuts experience free from the subject and reveals trauma --and experience as such-- to be ingrained within language, to be tropes of language. Trauma becoming abstract and detached from its experiential environment allows for its transmissibility, not however in terms of a traumatic essence which is encapsulated within the event. The textual narrator's identification with Andromaque corroborates the hypothesis, which Cathy Caruth puts forward, that trauma is an individual experience that exceeds itself.³⁵ All this transpires in the framework of the co-inhering of all (traumatic) experience in language. Shoshana Felman writes that "a 'life testimony' is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can *penetrate us like an actual life*."³⁶ The incommensurability between trauma and its enveloping cognitive and moral environments is what triggers off the traumatic impact itself, and necessitates the incubation of the latent experiential core in the midst of maturing cognitive conditions. The accessibility of trauma is an effect of its constitutive imbrication in discourse and testifies to the transferential power the latter enables. However, the textual narrator's enhancement of the loss and mourning that the female figure and the swan embody constitutes a working-through of the traumatic material that has nothing to do with identifications in the egological sense. What shapes up

³⁵ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 136; cited in Amy Hungerford, "Memorizing Memory," in *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.1 (2001): 83.

³⁶ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M. D., *Testimony: The Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 2; cited in Amy Hungerford, "Memorizing Memory," 73.

here is a performative *memorization without memory*, the performance of mnemonic scenes without a hypothetically accessible experiential deposit of contents to offset the radical particularity of the anamnestic enactment's referent.³⁷ Not far from de Man's *Gedächtnis*, this purely performative memory relates to the iterative negativity of allegory. It exhibits its awareness of the destruction of the semantic core of its targets in a mode close to allegory's "yield[ing] ... its meaning as the display of its very allegorical structure."³⁸ The meaning of the anamnestic object is seen here to be attained only through the denial of the mnemonic sign. It can be extracted at the cost of the depletion of the latter into a readable grid of significations. This way, the disjunction between sign and meaning that allegory and memory embrace as their true theme is hushed up. But not for long. "Le Cygne" puts an irrevocable embargo on the filling up of the chasm between mnemonic sign and its significations not least by enhancing the *virtual* character of the anamnestic enterprise. The impossibility of remaining faithful to the materiality of memory's referents *and* distilling a semantic core out of them at the same time is worked through in a mode which is that of allegory "as [both] fulfilling and denying [the connection between sign and its meaning]."³⁹

The female figure as allegory of loss and transience relates to the heroine of "À une passante" (OC I: 92-3) with "sa jambe de statue." Both elicit the understanding of the temporal passage of presence as relentless process of undialectical, literal passing away. The marmoreal nature of their posture points

³⁷ See Hungerford, "Memorizing memory," 83-88.

³⁸ Bahti, *Allegories of History*, 264.

³⁹ Bahti, *Allegories of History*, 287: "The 'doubled insight' into allegory as fulfilling and denying connects sign and meaning in the very manner of disconnection or discord, as the (new, doubled) sign of allegory."

not to an emergence of presence as and in stasis in an ideal abstraction from the temporal order, but to the ruination of the cognitive core of experience in the midst of a suspended, "frozen" witnessing. The same logic governs "La Beauté" (OC I: 21), where beauty presents itself as "un rêve de pierre [a dream of stone]." Elissa Marder writes apropos of the former poem that "'À une passante' stages a strangely embodied, immobilized, and undialectical death where private mourning meets the banality, the *lieu commun*, of the public space. The passing woman never quite dies, but rather becomes a figure for death's immobile movement."⁴⁰ It is the same logic that embeds the narrator's memories in "Le Cygne" within successive layers of historical ruins and relays of losses, from Troy to present-day Paris. The same counterpoint of transience and petrification is played out in this poem where history is reduced to an architectural palimpsest. The principal characters' memories blend empathetically, the rubble of Troy fuses with a fluid and rapidly metamorphosing Paris, and all this transpires in the frame of a non-dialectical affiliation of allegorical antiquity to modernity. It is non-dialectical because the ruination of experience and its cognitive potential is endemic in history as such and cannot be exclusively appended to a particular era.⁴¹

The dazzling transformation of the city to which the narrator testifies along with his traumatic inability to process it cognitively are pointers to the latency inherent in experience. In Cathy Caruth's words, "The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after the forgetting [in the form of unsolicited mnemonic resurgence], but that it is only in and through its

⁴⁰ Elissa Marder, "Flat Death: Snapshots of History," *Diacritics* 22 (fall-winter 1992): 142.

⁴¹ "The correspondence between antiquity and modernity is the sole constructive conception of history in Baudelaire....[I]t excludes any dialectical conception" (Benjamin, "Konvolut J: Baudelaire, 337).

inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness of ... historical experience."⁴² The latency in question, the cleavage between the perception of the event and its cognitive assimilation in overarching settings, educes the textual subject's allegorical construal of reality by dissolving the linear unfolding of unobstructedly archived reality tokens. The chasm in question impacts on any notion of horizontal history and unimpeded witnessing. "Tout pour moi devient allégorie" voices the impossibility of assigning experience a cognitive appendix that will graft it onto a wider frame of understanding. Everything turns allegorical of everything else as a result of an endemic deficiency of semantic containment. Allegory takes off whenever the symbolic binding of witnessed and/or represented event and constative appropriation remains unfulfilled. However, the awareness that emanates from the poem does not re-establish the closure of cognition but reiterates the semantic voiding of the text while thematically gesturing to it through the allegorical mode. Paris changes "... plus vite, hélas ! que le coeur d'un mortel," which again points to an inherently hindered testimony. Testifying to change presupposes a pivotal immobile vantage point from which change can be registered. The narrator is integrally deprived of it. The ocular reciprocity between subjects themselves and subject and reality gives requisite to the negotiation of quotidian reality has devolved to a screening of semiotically juxtaposed impressions. The poem's narrator does not see anything in the pragmatic sense but just teases apart a mnemonic nexus into which insight into the constitutive chasm separating one's

⁴² Cathy Caruth, "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History," *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): 187.

bearing witness from accounting for the witnessed event in cognitively and pragmatically satisfactory terms has been interwoven: "Je ne vois qu'^eun esprit Je pense à Là je vis Je vois ce malheureux Une image m'opprime ...". Seeing here is equivalent to remembering. What is lacking throughout is the primal historical referent that would ideally bind the remembered scenes into reciprocally illuminating strung out serial components.

CHAPTER SIX

THE MATERIAL GAZE AND THE BAUDELAIREAN SUBLIME

Baudelaire's dual engagement with aesthetics and history

This chapter aims at refining concerns that were elaborated in the previous ones, i.e., the defensive and self-defeating character of a mnemonic cohesion of the self, the semiotic parcelling of historical linearity, and the impact of the allegorical gaze. The analysis of two parameters that I consider to be of cardinal purport in the poetry of Baudelaire, i.e., the non-cognitive gaze and the urban sublime, will frame these concerns. Baudelaire condenses the contours of modern subjectivity in his elaboration of its central themes and aporias: the defensive character of memory and, by extension, consciousness itself, the tropological underpinnings of reason, the precariousness of a rationality corroded by a desire formed at the interstices between psyche and culture, the mnemonic pseudo-cohesion of the self, the transgression of the symbolic chora by material semiosis, the irreversible aggravation of socio-symbolic codes. Awareness of the non-historical causes of self-alienation and mnemonic and sexual reification solicits the understanding of a social commonality of values in terms of a categorical imperative outside the boundaries of natural philosophy. The coercive character of this imperative is ultimately put into relief through the poetry's address of the tensional enmeshment of intra-historical and linguistic forces that obey the laws of their own historicity. Baudelaire writes as if in the grip of the awareness that every linguistic mooring is dependent upon, and therefore fissured by, a series of

elusive *points de capiton*.¹ The impossibility of anchoring them is the supra-historical source of his melancholia. In his lyrics physical love is accompanied by what Paul de Man diagnosed as a true and non-deluded mourning, one that can “allow for non-comprehension and enumerate non-anthropomorphic, non-elegiac, that is to say, ... *historical* modes of language power.”² In their agonal striving for physical gratification and mental stability his characters are denied not only a desire-appeasement expected to follow upon their physical and mental exhaustion, but also the cognitive satiety accompanying the motions of understanding. The agon of Baudelaire, and the task that his modernity mandates, is the acceptance of this physical and mental “funereal monumentality,” the semiotic materiality of language and body, while resisting an always accompanying “paranoid fear”³ over the loss of cognitive plenitude.

The texts condense most of Modernity's tensions in a way that enhances the uneasy dialectic between an understanding of historical conjuncture as being foundational of the subject and an insight into the supra-historical parameters that frustrate the reduction of both subject and literary event to an effect of historical juncture. I have already traced in the Baudelairean melancholia the effects of the latter insight coupled with a concrete evaluation (and not simply an instinctive grasping) of the surrounding political reality. Walter Benjamin and Max Pensky chose to read in this sorrowful poetry the political impotence of someone who ultimately accepts the abstraction from the social being of man associated with

¹ See Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 126: “[The *points de capiton*] are the linguistic form of the neurotic symptom. It is this interplay of metaphoric and metonymic axes that structures the unconscious like a language (as Lacan says).”

² Paul de Man, “Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric,” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 262.

³ See de Man, “Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric,” 259.

aestheticism.⁴ Theirs is not an unqualified or unwavering verdict, however, which points to their resistance to some of their own assumptions that can equally be discerned in the critical evaluations of Richard Terdiman. The qualifications in question approximate a sheer contradiction at times. The tension in these analyses relates to Baudelaire's working through of the topological infrastructure of historical existence, and to the inner antinomies of a certain reception of it that purports to be sensitive to both the political and rhetorical determinations of the examined texts. The necessity that the theorists in question faced was to do justice to Baudelaire's aesthetic specificities while never losing focus on the broader historical vista. The fact that Baudelaire's aesthetic understanding does not collapse into political and/or existential paralysis is an issue that partakes of the political dimension. Baudelaire's centrality as the *de facto* modern poet and as an author of inexhaustible implications for what we conveniently label as "post-modernity," i.e., our own present, emanates from his dual and simultaneous engagement with aesthetics and history in a way that necessitates the re-negotiation of both terrains. His poetry countenances the valorisation of the historical dimension as formative of subjectivity *and* the irreducible materiality of language as a force that exceeds historical constraints and internally responds to the exigencies of its own historicity.⁵ This chapter will conclude with an affirmative recapitulation of the conflictual investments

⁴ See Walter Benjamin, "Baudelaire or the Streets of Paris," in *Baudelaire*, 172: "[T]here springs the conception of the total work of art which attempts to isolate art against the development of technology. The rites with which it is celebrated are the counterpart of the distractions which transfigure the commodity. Both abstract from the social being of man. Baudelaire succumbs to the infatuation of Wagner."

⁵ These constraints are understood here with the canonised denotations of the term. See Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 290: "History has always been understood as the movement of a resumption of history, as a detour between two presences."

permeating Baudelairean subjectivity as framed by this dual engagement.

A final theme that will be treated here is the Baudelairean gaze, a particular way of *seeing* that undercuts the passage from perception to apperception/cognition. I argue that the factor that effects this blockage and helps undermine perception as a portal to essence, is the *sublime*, or rather the urban inflection that Baudelaire gave it in his poetry. I contend that he is the first poet who denaturalised the sublime and stared at city constructs with the sense of awe and cognitive innocence that had been exclusively preserved for the non-human sublime creations of nature. The enigmatic character of his urbanism, and the fact that it does not degenerate into reflexive prosaicism, has a direct bearing on the metamorphosis of the sublime. I will emphasise its urban modalities and perforation by elements of the grotesque present in the form of a dissective concentration on the moribund and distorted body and a pervasive irony that aims at, and effects, a profound humiliation of the human dimension. It remains to be seen how the Baudelairean gaze fails to render perception and conception commensurate and fulfil the demand for a scopic recuperation of the fragmented realities under the auspices of a perceiving macro-consciousness. I contend that this "failure" is negatively inscribed within the textual agenda as an enabling condition and signals, but does not lament, the inability to imbue the object of vision, and the subject as carrier of vision, with cognitive stability.

The starting point is Benjamin's ambiguous remarks on the predominantly optic character of the allegorical interest: "In allegory the original interest is not linguistic but optic."⁶ Paul de Man's novel reading of the Kantian sublime

⁶ Benjamin, "Central Park," 52.

emphasising the latter's materiality and its purely "architectonic" and non-phenomenalist perception of reality, frames my analysis. Cynthia Chase, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Susanne Gearhart, Susan Buck-Morss, Linda Marie Brooks, Paul de Man, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, among others, have contributed to a new awareness of what is involved in the Romantic specular organisation of reality. Their contributions converge on the modern controversion of phenomenalist models of representation that Baudelaire's poetry anyway debunked.⁷ In this respect, his significance for poetic modernity lies in his working up the nature of representation on a basis that would do justice to the agency of imagination and memory away from a belief in either a documentaristic or a hyper-imaginative specular replication of reality. Finally, it must be stressed that this theoretical reorientation vis-à-vis the sublime and its corrosive impact on subjectivity could not have been undertaken without the prior exertion of a distinctly Franco-American critical labour that has effected the rehabilitation of Romanticism and the revelation of its conceptual wealth and relevance for the understanding of modern subjectivity and representation.⁸

“Les Sept Vieillards”: the rift between perception and cognition

LES SEPT VIEILLARDS

Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!
Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves
Dans les canaux étroits du colosse puissant.
.....

⁷ Bibliographical references to works by the authors mentioned above will be given in the following sections individually.
⁸ The names of Paul de Man, Barbara Johnson, Rodolphe Gasché, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy immediately spring to mind, along with those of the critics whose work I have drawn upon and whose interests orbit around the project in question.

Tout à coup, un vieillard dont les guenilles jaunes
Imitaient la couleur de ce ciel pluvieux,
Et dont l'aspect aurait fait pleuvoir les aumônes,
Sans la méchanceté qui luisait dans ses yeux,

M'apparut...

.....

Son pareil le suivait: barbe, oeil, dos, bâton, loques,
Nul trait ne distinguait, du même enfer venu,
Ce jumeau centenaire, et ces spectres baroques
Marchaient du même pas vers un but inconnu.

À quel complot infâme étais-je donc en butte,
Ou quel méchant hasard ainsi m'humiliait?
Car je comptai sept fois, de minute en minute,
Ce sinistre vieillard qui se multipliait!

.....

Aurais-je, sans mourir, contemplé le huitième,
Sosie inexorable, ironique et fatal,
Dégoutant Phénix, fils et père de lui-même?
--Mais je tournai le dos au cortège infernal.

Exaspéré comme un ivrogne qui voit double,
Je rentrai, je fermai la porte, épouvanté,
Malade et morfondu, l'esprit fiévreux et trouble,
Blessé par le mystère et par l'absurdité!

Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre;
La tempête en jouant déroutait ses efforts,
Et mon âme dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre
Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords! (OC I: 87-8)

THE SEVEN OLD MEN

Swarming city, city full of dreams,
Where the apparition meets the passer-by in full daylight!
Mysteries flow everywhere like vital sap
In the narrow veins of this mighty colossus.

Suddenly, an old man whose yellow rags
Resembled the colour of rainy skies,
And whose appearance would have invited showers of alms,
Were it not for the wickedness glinting in his eyes,

Appeared in front of me...

.....

His double followed him: beard, eye, back, stick, rags,
No single feature could distinguish this ripe centenarian
Ejected from the same Hell, and these baroque phantoms
Walked with the same pace towards some unknown destination.

What infamous conspiracy was I the victim of?
What evil chance humiliated me?
For I counted, minute by minute,
This sinister old man multiply by seven!

.....

Could I, without dying, have looked on yet an eighth one,
A pitiless, ironic, fatal double,
Disgusting Phoenix, son and father of himself?
--But I turned my back on this infernal procession.

Irritated like a drunkard that sees double,
I returned to my place, and closed the door, wasted,
Sick and depressed, my mind feverish and troubled,
Hurt by the mystery and absurdity of the whole affair!

In vain did my reason try to compose itself;
The tempest frustrated all its efforts,
And my soul danced, danced, like some old barge
Without mast, on a monstrous and shoreless sea!

"Les Sept Vieillards" addresses the non-commensurability of perceived and cognised referents in the form of the return of the same (the procession of seven identical old men haunting the narrator). A reality that has been reduced to the formulaic repetition of the same-as-difference confronts the dazzled spectator, difference being produced in this case only by the movement of repetition. A parallelism can be drawn between this movement of repetition and language's own production of semantic difference in and through the repetition of morphological units in the midst of differing environments. In both cases meaning can be produced only if one is willing to abstract from the materiality of the signifying unit and saturate the gap between the discursive and/or experiential

instances with a symbolic logic of inter-communicability on the basis of a commonality of essence. This is exactly what the narrator in "Les Sept Vieillards" proves unable, or unwilling, to do. "Aurais-je, sans mourir, contemplé le huitième / Sosie inexorable, ironique et fatal / Dégoûtant Phénix, fils et père de lui-même? / Mais je tournai le dos au cortège infernal [Could I, without dropping dead, have looked at the eighth / an inexorable, ironic and deadly double / repulsive Phoenix, son and father of himself? / But I turned my back on that infernal procession]." What proves to be infernal is the consanguineous generation of identical figures, of identity rather, on the basis of a common underlying essence ["son and father of himself"]. Filling up the gap between the apparitions with the hypothesis of a subtending generative essence repeating itself *ad infinitum* would amount to the resolution of the hermeneutic unresolve and its accompanying cognitive tension. This is what all semantics affirm when they assert the mediation of linguistic form with meaning in terms that still give primacy to the latter. This resolution is not offered by the text. On the contrary, what one gets is the delirious multiplication of meaningless formations confronting the narrator's consciousness as an irresolvable enigma: "Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre / La tempête en jouant déroute ses efforts / Et mon âme dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre / Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords! [In vain did my reason try to compose itself / The tempest frustrated all its efforts, / And my soul danced, danced, like some old barge / Without mast, on a monstrous and shoreless sea!]." Reason proves unable to reproduce the illusionary stratagem that constitutes one of its enabling premises, that is, the saturation of the cleavage separating temporally and ontologically disjunct

experiential crucibles from one another through the deployment of generative, cumulative, causal chains.

It is telling that this predicament of consciousness and reason is once more metaphorised in quasi-natural terms. The “old barge ... on a monstrous shoreless sea” related to the narrator’s soul, points to reason’s abandonment in the midst of inimical natural elements. Recourse to nature constitutes a common topos of Romanticism especially in the case of consciousness trying to borrow from nature the attributes of immutability, imperturbability, and cognitive appeasement that it lacks when confronted with its own paradoxes and constitutive aporiae. In this case the natural element is threatening, overwhelming in its expanse, “monstrous.” The limitlessness of the sea corresponds to the impossibility of containing the entropic reappearance of the figural apparitions. What fails here is the canonistic dimension of pure reason vis-à-vis an experience that puts in inverted commas the larger explanatory frameworks rendering the cognitive absorption of *aperçus* possible in the first place. Reason as a begetter of concepts ensuing upon the perception of reality-givens aborts. In other terms, the reason that purports to think the idea of the world as the unity of objective experience, and the concept of the soul as the common point of reference of the wholeness of internal experience, is *de facto* ineffectual. It is not only that reason cannot know the *Ding an Sich* in the Kantian sense, but that it fails to proceed from perception to satisfactory cognition. The inherent difficulty voiced by the poetic narrator is not the one that critical philosophy configured and ultimately resolved through the ultimate affirmation of Reason’s transcendentalist self-canonisation. Baudelaire’s poetry deprived itself of the consolations of the latter. The absolute unity of

consciousness presupposed in order to have a subject is here shattered and with this shattering the very capacity to cognitively assimilate reality is imperilled. The Baudelairean subject cannot respond to this challenge with a pre-critical, charismatic, intuitive insight that would render redundant the process of cognition through the mediation of concepts. The intuitive grasp of essential cosmic unities was never really there in Baudelaire. In Hegelian terms, "Les Sept Vieillards" thematises the impossibility of bringing the phenomenological trajectory of consciousness into fulfilment. The narrator fails to make the successive impressions cohere into a cognitive whole. He cannot translate his experience into a proposition free from semantic unresolve. The latter is not an indication of a hypothetical abundance of hermeneutic options but, quite to the contrary, marks the clogging up of the hermeneutic endeavour as such. There is literally nothing to interpret when confronted with a spectacle that puts one's axiological frameworks into abeyance. In this case, the perpetual multiplication of the same does not accrue to a recognisable underlying essence of experience, nor is it circumscribed within a testimonial framework, which could help the narrator allay his fears and proceed with a minimal conceptual negotiation. The rift between perception and cognition is irreversible and, most significantly, not regarded to be conjunctural (it is not attributed to drunkenness, for example, or to a pathology of the organs of perception). The succession of decrepit figures that so startles the poem's narrator is experienced as a series of shocks and inexorable forceful sights that constitute an integral given of the city. The configuration of space ("the houses seemed to stretch upwards by the mist.../ a dirty yellow fog flooded the whole of space...") makes it not only impossible to immerse the frightful

spectacle into a massuaging framework, but comes to corroborate the cancerous amplification of the experience through the elongation of architectural forms and the stifling penetration of solid space by the fluid indistinctness that fog stands for. One gets a similar *liquidation* of synthetic experience in Eliot's configuration of space in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" ("The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, / The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes, / Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening"). The perceptual configurations of the text point to a crisis-fissured experience and, equally important, to a characteristically defensive posture and anticipatory mood on the part of the narrator ("Je suivais, *roidissant mes nerfs comme un héros* / Et discutant avec mon âme déjà lasse [I was making my way, *heroically steeling my nerves* and arguing with my already weary soul]").⁹ The need to intercept shock is here affirmed in the manner of a certain readiness that presupposes the inherently threatening impact of metropolitan reality.

Ultimately, the perception of the seven disturbing figures cannot be subsumed under an over-arching concept that would ideally imbue them with a minimal propositional content. The narrator's perceptual referents never accede to the chora of conceptual abstraction (the human figures are not metaphors), whereas his communicative intent fails to fulfil what it promises, i.e., the unravelling of the semantic enigma posed by the tyrannical proliferation of the other-as-same. The narrator is faced with the task of conceiving of difference differentially and disregarding the common denominators of its manifestations.¹⁰

⁹ OC I: 87/CV, 177; emphasis added.

¹⁰ See Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," 182. Repetition would then "cease to function as the dreary succession of the identical [It would produce] a meaning-event by repeating a phantasm."

Faced with the unhindered amplification of the figure(s) he succumbs to the defamiliarising effects of a homomorphic figural series without content import. The *figure* is now beyond the hermeneutic grasp and unseats all heuristic processes. It is presented in all its barrenness as pure form devoid of intellectual complications and totally exogenous to the transcendental dimension inherent in the concept. There is no symbiosis of perception and cognition in this quantal zone where material form/signifier exposes and ironises the necessity of enveloping itself with the folds of meaning in order to exist at all. It is a mockery of meaning, however, judging from the narrator's reactions and the inconclusiveness of his interpretative gestures. The ironic parameter intrinsic to the text¹¹ seals off the narrative from a hypothetical recuperation of lost content at the level of intent and/or metafigural awareness of the belabored aporia.¹² The poem turns into an allegory of the endemic rift between the perceptual and conceptual organisation of reality vis-à-vis a consciousness that is only functional enough to register its own incapacity to render its referents and phenomenological impetus commensurate. It never monumentalises its insights into the crippling effects of this rift, however, and thematises the blindness inherent in any passage from perception to cognition as enabling of communication.

¹¹ Concerning irony, see Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 173-209, esp. 195-205; repr., in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* 2nd ed. Introduction by Wlad Godzich (London: Methuen, 1983), 187-228.

¹² The imbrication of the grotesque within the incomprehensible is a given in this poem as well. The old man's appearance "would have invited showers of alms," the old men are described as "baroque phantoms," whereas a hypothetical eighth one would be "pitiless, ironic."

The material gaze and the sublime suspension of affection and cognition

Jean-Luc Nancy has observed that "the sublime does not constitute in the general field of [re]presentation just one more instance or problematic: it transforms or redirects the entire motif of presentation In the sublime, the imagination no longer has to do with its products but with its operation --and thus with its limit."¹³ It is within this conceptual framework that several of Baudelaire's lines can be seen to address imagination's enabling conditions.¹⁴ For instance, the apostrophe at the end of the "Spleen LXXVI" poem (OC I: 73) projects the freezing of imagination's faculties onto a liminal experience of representation: "-Désormais tu n'est plus, ô matière vivante! / Qu'un granit entouré d'une vague épouvante, / Assoupi dans le fond d'un Sahara brumeux; / Un vieux sphinx ignoré du monde insoucieux, / Oublié sur la carte, et dont l'humeur farouche / Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil qui se couche [Henceforth, O living matter, you are but a granite form shrouded in vague horror, / listlessly sunken in the depths of a mist-bound Sahara, / an old Sphinx unknown to the uncaring world, / forgotten on the map, and whose grim humour / is to sing only in the rays of the setting sun]."¹⁵ I will link Walter Benjamin's understanding of the petrification of the organic dimension in Baudelaire's poetry in terms that reflect objective social determinations with what Christine Buci-Glucksmann calls "the baroque phenomenology of the new," and, most significantly, the "fixation on

¹³ Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Sublime Offering," in *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question* (New York: State University of New York, 1993), 34, 40.

¹⁴ See Paul de Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant," in *Hermeneutics*, ed. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 140 passim.

¹⁵ OC I: 73/CV, 155-56; translation Francis Scarfe's.

sight and the anxiety of losing it, and above all the dread of the fragmented body."¹⁶

The reduction of living matter to the inorganic sphinx allegorises the rupture of modernist imagination with naturalism and inscribes within the imaginative act what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy call "the necessity of presenting, with the object, the conditions of possibility of the object's production. In romantic terms, it concerns the entire logic of *the formation of form*."¹⁷ In Nancy's terms this procedure reflects an enhanced awareness, which I believe Baudelaire exhibits, of the *presentation of presentation*¹⁸ beyond the unifying space of the (naturalist) figure. The Sphinx, as the allegorical signifier of the realm of imagination and cognition, is the intransitive and non-affective entity *par excellence*, non-speaking and non-engaging in a scopic reciprocity. Therefore, what is involved here is the depletion of the enabling conditions of phenomenology, baroque or otherwise, the depletion of the exchange between mind and nature.^{Buci-}Glucksmann seems to insinuate this impossible dialectic of perceptual fixations and de-auraticised, forgetful, (as Paul de Man contends about the sphinx of the *Spleen* poem)¹⁹ non-reciprocating objects of ocular desire. She writes: "Now, the ubiquitous metaphors of the eye and the petrifying dual look (divine/infernal) [or sublime/grotesque], like all the correlates exhibited by the image, define the Baudelairean theatre of the modern and of the feminine. Or rather, modernity is this theatricality which is *constantly eroticizing the new*. For

¹⁶ Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason*, 166-67.

¹⁷ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 104; emphasis added.

¹⁸ Nancy, "The Sublime Offering," 43.

¹⁹ See Paul de Man, "Introduction," in Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), xxv.

if the eye functions here as the organ of the passions and of their aggravation, the theatre for its art is unreal and lacking in affect."²⁰ The non-affective dimension of the "theatre" where non-reciprocity is staged enables the inflection of representation towards what Nancy called "the presentation of *presentation* itself." The sublime Sphinx serves as the allegory of the depletion of representation and incarnates one of the constituting motifs of poetic modernity: the crisis of testimonial accountability.

Apropos of the sphinx in "Spleen LXXVI" Paul de Man writes: "But the sphinx is not an emblem of recollection but, like Hegel's sign, an emblem of forgetting He is the grammatical subject cut off from its consciousness, the poetic analysis cut off from its hermeneutic function, the dismantling of the aesthetic and pictorial world of "le soleil qui se couche [the setting sun]" by the advent of poetry as allegory."²¹ Representational motion purified of testimonial import impregnates the Baudelairean text with its instances of a petrifying look, and qualifies the hysterical love of his protagonists as a *marmoreal and material love*, exchanged in between bodies that exhibit sculptural immobility.²²

²⁰ Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason*, 166. See also "L'Amour du mensonge [The love of falsehood]" (OC I: 98-100/ CV I: 195-8) which exemplifies the lack of affect and void of essence that inhabit the melancholy ocular space of the Baudelairean subjects: "Je sais qu' il est des yeux, des plus mélancoliques, / Qui ne recèlent point de secrets précieux; / Beaux écrins sans joyaux, médaillons sans reliques, / Plus vides, plus profonds que vous-mêmes, ô Cieux! [I know that there are eyes of deepest melancholy, / But which do not contain any precious secrets; / Fine caskets empty of jewels, lockets with no relics in them, / Emptier and deeper than the heavens!];" translation Francis Scarfe's, slightly modified.

²¹ De Man, "Introduction," xxv.

²² There are numerous examples of the marmoreal quality of the human body in the poetry of Baudelaire. All testify to the reification of naturality that is endemic in the deepest layers of naturality, in the oversexed body which ideally should be the site of unimpeded vitality. There are telling textual instances where the female body is both volatile and sculpturally solid. See, among others, "Le Léthé," in *Les Épaves* section (OC I: 155/CV I: 277-8): "Viens sur mon coeur, ... / Tigre adoré, monstre aux airs indolents; // Je veux dormir! // J'étalerai mes baisers sans remords / Sur ton beau corps poli comme le cuivre [Come upon my heart, ... / Adorable tigress, monster in your indolent airs; // I want to sleep, ... / I will lavish my kisses without remorse / On your beautiful body that is polished like bronze];" emphasis added. The stressed materiality of the

Paul de Man, in his last essays on Kant, elaborated upon this (Kantian) material, intransitive vision [*Augenschein*], which, I believe, permeates the splenetic Baudelairean gaze, and thus makes the poetry resonate with a modernist problematisation of representation. In a few words, *Augenschein* is a gaze devoid of reflexive or intellectual complications, a gaze that does not obey the dictates of personological intentions.²³ In a state of pure disinterestedness this non-teleological regard architectonises the sublime objects: oceans, heavens, forests and, in the case of Baudelaire, city sites such as cathedrals. He is the first poet who managed to de-naturalise the sublime and stare at urban tableaux with the same cognitive blankness that only the supernatural inspires ("Je ne vois qu'infini par toutes les fenetres [I can see but Infinity through every window])."²⁴ What is cancelled here is the putative exchange between mind and nature that has been indiscriminately credited to the Romantic sublime. Kantian *Augenschein* moves beyond Hegel's *Ideenschein*, the sensory appearance of the idea. No symbolic dimension inheres in it and no exchange of mental and natural properties occurs

female body translates a new economy of *jouissance* beyond the male symbolic sovereignty as well as the material dimension of the human body that does not yield to sense.

²³ See de Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant," 133-5. See also Immanuel Kant, "Book II: Analytic of the Sublime," in *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 97-123.

²⁴ Interestingly, the pursuit of the infinite transpires in the framework of female homosexuality in "Femmes Damnées" (OC I: 113-4). Lesbians are therein apostrophised as "Chercheuses d'infini [Seekers of the infinite]." This brings the conjunction of sterility and hollow transcendence in sharp relief. The all-inclusive character of homosexual women denotes the infinite divisibility of self and its penetration by otherness: "Ô vierges, ô démons, ô monstres, ô martyres, / De la réalité grands esprits contempteurs [O virgins, demons, monsters, martyrs, / Great minds who despise reality]." The same concern is encountered in "L'Héautontimorouménos" (OC I: 78-9). Sterility and the voiding of (reproductive) naturality that lesbians exemplify are given a melancholic twist that distorts and enriches the familiar motifs of transcendence, materiality, and corrosive desire. In "Femmes Damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte" the heroines carry the infinite within them: "L'âpre stérilité de votre jouissance / Altère votre soif et roidit votre peau, // Faites votre destin, âmes désordonnées, / Et fuyez l'infini que vous portez en vous! [The cruel sterility of your *jouissance* / Increases your thirst and eats away at your skin // Fulfil your destiny, disordered souls, / And flee from the infinite that you carry inside]" (OC I: 152-5).

within the understanding it fakes, or in the mode of anthropomorphism.²⁵ "Spleen LXXVI" belabours the passage from the natural sublime to a formal, optical materialism that counters the values of aesthetic experience. There is no reflexive depth in the gaze of the Sphinx, just as the "mirror of the sea" in "L'Homme et la mer" turns out to be flat, the illusion, and not the reflection, of fathomless interiority.²⁶

Paul de Man ingenuously explores the Kantian notion of a body that has been liberated from the purposive function of the limbs in the case of the physical sublime. He links this deliverance to the disarticulation of cognitive seeing. The severance of the limbs from the organic totality of the body finds an echo in the corporeal *montage* of fragmented somatic instances in the Baudelairean text, especially with regard to the feminine body. The trajectory that de Man delineated vis-à-vis the Kantian text can be applied to the poetry as a move that leads from the organismic to the phenomenological, and from the latter to the material; from the phenomenality of the aesthetic to the materiality of *Augenschein*. The affective neutrality and optical materialism of this poetry threaten the constative patterns that uphold the narratives. In "Obsession" the link between perception and understanding is mediated by hallucination to the point where it is useless to search for any stable propositional background at all.

²⁵ See de Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant," 135. The Sphinx of the Spleen poem complicates the boundaries between human and natural and cannot serve as an anthropomorphic paradigm.

²⁶ See "L'Homme et la mer [Man and the Sea]," in OC I: 19: "Homme libre, ... / La mer est ton miroir; [Free man, ... / The sea is your mirror]." On the surface the poem seems to affirm the mutual recognition of nature and consciousness. However, it is their mutual incomprehension that is ultimately put forward in the mode of an eternal struggle between the two: "Ô lutteurs éternels, ô frères implacables! [O eternal wrestlers, implacable brothers!]."

Comme tu me plairais, ô nuit! sans ces étoiles
Dont la lumière parle un langage connu!
Car je cherche le vide, et le noir, et le nu!

Mais les ténèbres sont elles-mêmes des toiles
Où vivent, jaillissant de mon oeil par milliers,
Des êtres disparus aux regards familiers. (OC I: 75)

How you would please me, O Night! without those stars
Whose light speaks a language known!
Because I look for the void, the black, and the bare!

But the shadows themselves are canvases
Where vanished beings with their familiar gaze
Leap by the thousand from my own eyes.

De Man's following contention is relevant to my argument: "The lyric depends entirely for its existence on the denial of phenomenality as the surest means to recover what it denies. This motion is not dependent, in its failure or in its illusion of success, on the good or bad faith of the subject it constitutes."²⁷ The possibility of representation is, first, negatively affirmed and, then in this case, thwarted by the very denial of phenomenality ["how you would please me, O night! without those stars / Whose light speaks a known language!"]. Baudelaire explicitly links phenomenality with speech. This is one more instance of the perpetual motif underlying most *Spleen* poems, that of the systematic aggravation of phenomenality due to its gradual relation and imbrication to language, and the climactic metamorphic crossings between perception, illusion, and aborted cognition, as in "Spleen LXXVI." Specular absence is not mourned here as in the case of T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men." On the contrary, it is desired and this desire refuses to domesticate its referents by shedding the ample light of

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De Man, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," 259.

phenomenality on them. If one counterpoints all this to "L'ennui / Prend les proportions de l'immortalité [Boredom takes on the proportions of immortality]" ("Spleen LXXVI," OC I: 73), then the phenomenal-temporal dimension is disjointed to such a degree as to merely serve as the enframing context of sheer unintelligibility. Most significantly, the Sphinx that refuses the lure of phenomenal cognition ["sunken in the depths of a mist-bound Sahara"] is impervious to the attractions and warmth of the light, and his "humour is to sing only in the rays of the setting sun." The constant negation of light, in the frame of the latter's explicit connection with speech in "Obsession," brings into sharp relief the dual resistance of the examined texts towards both the recuperative force of phenomenal experience ["Spleen LXXVI"] and referential language ["Obsession"]. This resistance occurs by means of a poetic language that stages its own oxymora in the mode of a lyrical discourse that both admits of and dislocates conceptual resolution.

Finally, it is in "Les Aveugles [The Blind Ones]" (OC I: 92) that the non-cognitive gaze takes on its clearest formulation. The spectacle of blind men groping their way along the city streets and craning their necks towards the sky fills the narrator with dread and anxiety. He is disturbed by them because they retain the posture of a testimonial encounter with reality while obviously being unable to optically appropriate any referent at all: "Leurs yeux, d'où la divine étincelle est partie, / Comme s'ils regardaient au loin, restent levés / Au ciel [Their eyes, from which the divine spark has fled, / As though they were staring into the distance, remain lifted / Towards the sky]." There is no substitution of other sense impressions for their predicament, either, and they remain throughout

imperturbable when faced with urban auditory stimuli. The blind have left the realm of the phenomenal, yet, seem to both acknowledge and defy it by darting their eyes to the skies above. This non-semantic look that still exhibits traits of volitional behaviour is a schema for the possibility of sustaining the decorum of reference without distilling a conceptual modicum out of it. Reference in this case is merely gestural.

"Ils sont vraiment affreux! [They are really hideous]" affirms the bewildered narrator, yet, hastens to add in the concluding strophe: "Vois! Je me traîne aussi! Mais, plus qu'eux hébété, / Je dis: Que cherchent-ils au Ciel, tous ces aveugles? [Look! I also follow suit! But, more stupefied than they, / I say: What are they looking for, all these blind men?]." This mixture of repulsion and fascination is a typical response to monstrosity "made all the more intolerable by [its] highly formalised intellect."²⁸ Their mechanical character ["pareils aux mannequins ... / ... singuliers comme les somnambules"] gives off their true function as figures of formal motion that has no need of semantic intentions. Serving as a *trope* of inherently aborted perception that still retains the graceful decorum of reference, they exemplify the negation of self-reflexive consciousness. They are like Heinrich von Kleist's puppet-dancers, non-expressive, free from the "risk of affectation," unfettered by egological commitments.²⁹ Their gestures sustain the formal modality of stable and elegant movement, the physical equipoise of "sommambulists," while emanating, like in the case of the latter, from a zone that is neither purely corporeal nor mental.³⁰ Their human dimension can only result

²⁸ Paul de Man, "Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist," in *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 289.

²⁹ See de Man, "Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist," 286 *passim*.

³⁰ Ross Chambers writes of their "unconcern for the transcendent dimension" and their turning to a sky of "dubious noological status" ("Seeing and Saying in Baudelaire's 'Les

from the superimposition of the narrator's exegetic consciousness upon their marionette-like movement, and the substitution of a hypothetical intentionality animating their gestures for their purposeless mechanical act. This latter must be turned into a pursuit of meaning, a defensive motion of understanding: "Je dis: Que cherchent-ils au Ciel, tous ces aveugles?" This impatient question voices a genuine amazement over the bypassing of prevalent modes of absorbing reality data, that is, the ocular domestication of the external world. The standard defence against the formalisation that this provocative blindness exhibits is the imposition of an affective dialogism between subjects, or an affective state within soliloquy treated as interiorised dialogue. The narrator's soliloquy, however, leaves the blind men intact: "Ils traversent ainsi le noir illimité, / Ce frère du silence éternel [They traverse limitless night, / The brother of eternal silence]." They confront the auditory delirium of the city ("Ô cité! / Pendant qu'autour de nous tu chantes, ris, et beugles [O city! While you sing all around us, and laugh, and howl]") with a stoic indifference that makes a mockery of any dialogic exchange and seals them off from any potential intercourse based on need or dependency.³¹ The narrator's mystification has a productive aspect, however. It does not merely affirm in a negative mode the aporia of blindness endemic in the core of every perceptual encounter with reality that imperils any constative certainty. It also translates an aesthetic response that tries to reintegrate cognitive errancy within the centripetal

Aveugles," in *Pre-text, Text, Context: Essays on Nineteenth-Century French Literature*, ed. Robert L. Mitchell [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980], 148).

³¹ See de Man, "Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist," 288: "Nothing is more mechanical than the overpowering romantic figure of interiorization and self-consciousness. Hegel will say the same thing in a crucial passage from the *Encyclopedia* when he defines thought (*Denken*) as the substitution of *Gedächtnis* (the learning by rote of a conventional code) for *Erinnerung* (interiorization, represented in Kleist's text as the affective response of a consciousness to a mechanically formalized motion)." I have already tried to show how Baudelaire's poetry reveals the contingency of *Eigendenken* upon *Gedächtnis*.

movement of cognisable intentionality. It is the ultimate containment of semantic suspension of which de Man writes that as "an aesthetic education [it] inevitably confuses dismemberment of language by the power of the letter with the gracefulness of a dance. This dance, regardless of whether it occurs as mirror, as imitation, as history, as the fencing match of interpretation, or as the anamorphic transformations of tropes, is the ultimate trap, as unavoidable as it is deadly."³² The blind men's somnambulistic gait resembles this "dance" that is but the dismemberment of cognition and reference within a referential posturing.

The sublime evacuation of the self: the hollowing out of representation

The sublime is a negative aesthetics *par excellence*, questioning art's representational function.

Linda Marie Brooks, *The Menace of the Sublime*

Jean-Luc Nancy's observation that the sublime transforms the entire motif of presentation³³ responds to the Kantian realisation that in the case of the sublime it is inhuman limitlessness that confronts the imagination, a limitlessness which as such challenges the schematising powers of the latter. Linda Marie Brooks focuses upon this "gap that opens between the empirical subject and the world she perceives" in the context of a configuration of the sublime in terms of an aesthetics of difference, and not of identity.³⁴ Her analyses are particularly

³² De Man, "Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist," 290. The "fencing match of interpretation" may be alluding to Baudelaire's poem "Le Soleil" from the "Tableaux parisiens" (OC I: 83): "Je vais m'exercer seul à ma fantasque escrime [I go practising my fantastic fencing all alone]." The narrator "trébuch[e] sur les mots comme sur les pavés [stumbles on words as against cobblestones]," and thus experiences the materiality of the letter. Benjamin quotes from the same poem right after having asserted that "Baudelaire made it his business to parry the shocks ... with his spiritual and physical self. This shock defence is depicted graphically in an attitude of combat" (Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 117-8). Benjamin embeds here psycholinguistic insights into a historicist pattern.

³³ Nancy, "The Sublime Offering," 34.

³⁴ Linda Marie Brooks, *The Menace of the Sublime to the Individual Self: Kant, Schiller, Coleridge and the Disintegration of Romantic Identity* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 35.

apposite to the discussion of the role of the sublime in Baudelaire because she explicitly relates it to a poet's "sudden awareness of the fictitiousness of his own attempts at signification."³⁵ Fictitiousness is a condition that equally recurs in the case of irony as well, and bears on allegorical reification. I have insisted that as an ensemble of tropes, allegory renders transparent its incommensurability with what it targets, and thus lays open its constative void. What is involved in both Baudelairean allegory and the sublime is the disruption of the "possibility of reappropriating meaning."³⁶ What ensues upon this disruption is "a double gesture which manifests both the poet's "demystified/modern state (his despair of meaning)" and his willed projection of a "mystified or naïve/classic state (his belief in meaning)."³⁷ In the case of Baudelaire this double gesture translates into the thematised withering of experience and the accompanying project of *correspondances*, i.e., the *spleen/idéal* axis. It has already been shown that the correspondences register data of remembrance, "data of prehistory" as Benjamin called them,³⁸ and not correlations of essences retrievable through synchronic synaesthesia or restorative memory. Most importantly, this dual gesture occurs in the mode of simultaneity and leaves the settling of cognitive accounts in perennial suspense.

Linking allegory and the sublime leads to the realisation that the

³⁵ Brooks, *The Menace of the Sublime*, 32.

³⁶ Brooks, *The Menace of the Sublime*, 32.

³⁷ Brooks, *The Menace of the Sublime*, 33. I am sceptical towards Brook's historicist annexation of the two antithetical states she describes. The paternalistic resolution of the "naïve, classical" belief in meaning into the acceptance of semantic unresolve is not generically, genetically, or chronologically conditioned, but constitutes an endemic trait of language. Embedding it into a linear dialectical narrative detracts from its unsettling character and finally rehabilitates meaning in the form of meta-awareness of its historically recognisable, and thus potentially reversible, demise.

³⁸ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 141.

Baudelairean economy of perception reenacts the depletion of subjective and historical existence that was diagnosed through the deployment of the allegorical method and the mnemonic dissolution of the self into quantal zones of experience. Benjamin's insistence on the predominantly specular character of allegory is particularly apposite here.³⁹ Equally relevant, however, is the way specularity in Baudelaire is inflected toward a sublime perception that is applied not to the overwhelming natural, nor to a limitless *magnitudo* that defies conceptual containment. It is attached to the historical fragment and the urban zone that are limitless not in the quantitative sense but in their infinite susceptibility to perpetual reelaboration triggered by the collapse of communal frameworks of experience. The same attachment concerns the mnemonic detritus.

The Baudelairean gaze signals the subliminal, but not sublimating, tracing of historical fragmentation at the limit of representation.⁴⁰ It can be aligned to the sublime experience on the basis of a mutual exasperation of presentation⁴¹ that, at the same time, contravenes the conventions of subjectivity and its corollaries in the sphere of human emotion.⁴² Jean-Luc Nancy's comments reach out to the subliminal targeting of historical and subjective fragmentation that I traced in the poetry, and can be related to what Paul de Man has read in the Kantian

³⁹ See Benjamin, "Central Park," 52.

⁴⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy apropos of the sublime as a liminal experience: "The schema of the image, of any schema -or the schema of totality, the schematism of total union- is extended toward and tensed in the extreme: it is the limit at the limit of its (ex)tension, the tracing -which is no longer quantifiable or hence traceable- of *magnitudo*" ("The Sublime Offering," 45).

⁴¹ It would be interesting to read this exasperation in counterpoint to Adorno's notion that the subject's socially mediated experiences defy representational depiction. See *Aesthetic Theory*, 283: "What goes beyond subjective intention and its arbitrariness has a correlative objectivity within the subject: in the form of that subject's experiences, insofar as their locus is situated beyond the conscious will. As their sedimentation, artworks are *imageless images*, and these experiences mock representational depiction" (emphasis added).

⁴² Baudelaire's passionate and distortional imagery with its Baconian rationale is relevant here.

Augenschein, the apathetic, non-affective and non-cognitive gaze.⁴³ Nancy writes: "If feeling properly so-called is always subjective, if it is indeed the core of subjectivity in a primordial 'feeling oneself' of which all the great philosophies of the subject could provide evidence, including the most 'intellectualist' among them, then the feeling of the sublime sets itself off -or affects itself- precisely as the reversal of both feeling and subjectivity. The sublime affection, Kant affirms, goes as far as the suspension of affection, the pathos of apathy."⁴⁴ I have already shown that "Les Aveugles" brings into sharp relief this suspension of affection while retaining a postural referential framework. The blind ones dart their hollow eyes into an equally empty sky that promises sublime transcendence only to frustrate their, or rather the narrator's, expectations.

The respite of affectivity does not preclude the unleashing of desire which, as Suzanne Guerlac has shown, "implies the irrationality of an infinite mode [the pursuit of an always elusive object of desire] and its finite realization [posited at least as ideal, or as intended]." In this case, "desire operates textually in *Les Fleurs du mal* as a complication of the beautiful and the sublime --of form and formlessness."⁴⁵ The Baudelairean sublime as cognitive non-containment bears on the poetic archiving of a desire that labours with the unhinging of sexual

⁴³ The intensification of the formalising impetus of the poetry in distinction to hypothetically encased socio-sexual contents, which compensates for the vanishing of the latter, is another facet of the situation. See Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 90.

⁴⁴ Nancy, "The Sublime Offering," 46. De Man condenses the relation between imagination, reason, and the sublime. Imagination can achieve loss of pathos through its elevation from a metaphysical/ideological to a transcendental/critical principle. The sacrifice of its empirical dimension allies it with reason and guarantees its abstraction from, and superiority over, nature. The sublime would pass entirely into reason were it not penetrated by imagination. The latter's ultimate task is to translate the abstractions of reason back into the phenomenal world of appearances and images. At the same time, it mediates the movement of the affects with the "legal, codified, formalized, stable order of reason." See "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant," 137-40.

⁴⁵ Suzanne Guerlac, *The Impersonal Sublime: Hugo, Baudelaire, Lautreamont* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 97.

objects. The history-sensitive explanation as to the causes of this situation would be the hollowing out of mediating socio-symbolic codes, theoretical consensus about which has turned into cliché. Apart from this, however, understanding human sexuality in semiotic terms (Lacan, Kristeva) may help to account for dimensions that cannot be inscribed within history without a residue of excess. I understand that Guerlac's construal of desire as infinite mode and finite realization works to complicate the opposition between the terms *beautiful* and *sublime*, especially when considered under the prism of Holland's insights into the nature of Baudelairean desire.⁴⁶ Not only does the Baudelairean sublime contaminate the beautiful with pain and evil, but it also reduces beautification into contentless intensification, a frenetic pursuit of gratification that fails to target its own referents adequately. The non-containment of desire resonates with the impossibility of phenomenalist closure that the sublime entails by virtue of the textual denaturalisation of the latter and its qualification in terms that render it proximate to the human body (the dead or sick body preferably) in the frame of the metropolis. The common logic sustaining the two spheres, those of desire and the sublime, is discernible within the imagery of the oversexed distorted body and its elevation to a field of contention between signification and asymbolia (which is exactly what the sublime constitutes in the first instance).⁴⁷ At stake within this imagery are also the mutual walling up of affection and repulsion, symbolicity and allegorical emblematisation, and finally the hankering after

⁴⁶ See Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 90 passim.

⁴⁷ See Suzanne Guerlac, "Transgression in Theory: Genius and the Subject of *La Révolution du langage poétique*," 250: "Parallel to the operations of the Kantian aesthetic sublime, the transgressive field of text (as of the sublime) pulverises the phenomenological subject and, at the same time, obliges a relation to the subject."

cognitive fulfilment and a state of cognitive disenchantment approximating moral and mental blankness.

Suzanne Guerlac conjuncts contentless and infinite desire in a logic that echoes that of Eugene Holland. Ultimately, she construes Baudelaire's sublimity as a "response to an infinity of desire, a 'privation' that no longer signifies a transcendental force."⁴⁸ In other words, the infiltration of beauty by evil, the infinitisation of contentless desire, the dialectic of desire as infinite mode and finite realisation, all these denaturalise the already tense dialectic of phenomenal limitlessness and Reason-detachment and its ultimate affirmation encountered in the Kantian sublime, and translate it in para-aesthetic terms. This translation cannot be subsumed under aestheticism since it critically impacts on the categories the latter depends on. What is more important, Guerlac claims that the disruption of the phenomenal/cognitive equilibrium is inscribed *within* the Kantian sublime itself, a view that is shared by Paul de Man. She writes:

In the sublime proper there is a breakdown of representation through a violence done to purpose, which, through a critical and ironic gesture (one that reinforces a division within the subject), reminds us that nature is mere appearance, merely phenomenal. It challenges a harmony, or analogical equivalence, between nature and the operations of the mind established through the subjective a priori of the principle of reflective judgement.⁴⁹

I read the last sentence as implying that the self-reflectiveness of reason vis-à-vis the sublime depletes the nature/mind homology. I agree with Guerlac that the sublime (especially as it operates in the poetry of Baudelaire) implicates the

⁴⁸ Guerlac, *The Impersonal Sublime*, 96.

⁴⁹ Guerlac, *The Impersonal Sublime*, 108.

domain of the aesthetic but at the same time "marks a point of resistance to aestheticism."⁵⁰ Baudelaire's modernity excels in the interimplication of the aesthetic and sublime spheres but in such a way as to denaturalise the latter and empty the former of any pretensions to cognitive homologues of the mind/nature type. Baudelaire's poetic practice has rendered the tension between the two realms visible and has bequeathed it to successive generations of hermeneuts with the proviso that the security behind the cognitive entrenchments of phenomenism is a false one. There has not been, and cannot be, a *depassement* of Baudelaire by putative successors that allegedly brought the aesthetic agenda to fruition, fulfilment, or closure (Mallarmé, for example, or the "post-moderns").⁵¹ I can only agree with Suzanne Guerlac when she chooses instead to propose modernity "as the paradoxical move of both erecting the autonomy of the aesthetic (Baudelaire) and of critiquing the aesthetic from the angle, not of a humanist ethic, but of the autonomy of ethos (Ducasse). This is the ambivalence we hear through the sublime in the writings of Hugo, Baudelaire, and Lautréamont-Ducasse, an ambivalence vital to a modern (or postmodern) horizon of art production".⁵²

⁵⁰ Guerlac, *The Impersonal Sublime*, 192.

⁵¹ See de Man, "Lyric and Modernity," in *Blindness and Insight*, 174 passim. He cites from Hans Robert Jauss, "Zur Frage der Strukturheit älterer und moderner Lyrik," *GRM* XLI (1960) and Karlheinz Stierle, "Möglichkeiten des dunklen Stils in den Anfängen moderner Lyrik in Frankreich," in *Immanente Ästhetik, Ästhetische Reflexion: Lyrik als Paradigma der Moderne*, ed. Wolfgang Iser (Munich: Poetik und Hermeneutik, Arbeitsergebnisse einer Forschungsgruppe II, 1966) in order to critique their "genetic concept of literary history and modernity" (de Man, "Lyric and Modernity," 174, fn 8). He exposes the fallacy of "dating the origins of modernism with historical accuracy" and Jauss' assumption that "the movement of lyric poetry away from representation is a *historical* process that dates back to Baudelaire as well as being the very movement of modernity" (183; emphasis added).

⁵² Guerlac, *The Impersonal Sublime*, 196. The ethos of Lautréamont-Ducasse consists in the elaborate playing out of specularly, and is thus more than relevant to the understanding of modernity and its primary anxieties. Guerlac insists that in *Les Chants de Maldoror* what takes place is the dramatisation and literalisation of "the relation between specular identification and the problematic of self-consciousness or subjectivity." In the *Poésies* she reads the "interdiscursive

Linda Marie Brook's combination of a radical configuration of the sublime sphere with a traditional historical pattern that mitigates the edge of her own insights symptomises the persistence of linear modes of accounting for semantic unresolve. The movement away from a traditionally sanctioned sublime to a non-phenomenalist one hypothetically enabled by the advances of modern poetry historicises what has been endemic in any sublime confrontation with reality. There cannot be a sublime that does not admit of layers of meaning that remain representational. In "Les Aveugles" the imbrication of the sublime and grotesque dimensions as embodied in the presence of the blind men takes on sinister undertones regarding the outcome of the hypothetical pursuit of transcendence (hypothetical because it is the narrator who ascribes their gestures intentionality). The representational and referential framework, however, is never elided. Casting off reference or phenomenality takes a higher toll than Brooks or anyone who grafts the tension between phenomenality and the blindness integral to the conceptual elaboration of reality onto a pattern of continuity are willing to admit. The same applies to the relationship between mimesis (and/or symbolicity) and allegory.⁵³

operations of the *plagiat*," a citational mode of intertextuality. In summary terms, one can say that the significance of both Baudelaire and Lautreamont is due, among other reasons, to their desublimating and nonphenomenological mode of confronting the sublime and representation.

⁵³ See de Man, "Lyric and Modernity", in *Blindness and Insight*, 185: "All representational poetry is always also allegorical, whether it be aware of it or not, and the allegorical power of the language undermines and obscures the specific literal meaning of a representation open to understanding. But all allegorical poetry must contain a representational element that invites and allows for understanding, only to discover that the understanding it reaches is necessarily in error."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE HISTORICAL AND TRANSHISTORICAL DIMENSIONS OF BAUDELAIRE'S POETRY

History may be servitude, History may be freedom
T. S. Eliot, "Four Quartets"

**"As a star without atmosphere": the tension between psychoanalytic
and historicist accounts of human experience¹**

Spleen LXXVI (OC I: 73) negotiates the erosive agency of temporality and the depletion of the reminiscing lyric subject in a way that takes into account the metonymic disanchoring of memory's referents.

J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans.

Un gros meuble à tiroirs encombré de bilans,
De vers, de billets doux, de procès, de romances,
Avec de lourds cheveux roulés dans des quittances,
Cache moins de secrets que mon triste cerveau.
C'est une pyramide, un immense caveau,
Qui contient plus de morts que la fosse commune.
--Je suis un cimetière abhorré de la lune,
Où comme des remords se traînent de longs vers
Qui s'acharnent toujours sur mes morts les plus chers.
Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées,
Où gît tout un fouillis de modes surannées,
Où les pastels plaintifs et les pâles Boucher,
Seuls, respirent l'odeur d'un flacon débouché.²

I am fuller of memories than if I had lived a thousand
years.

¹ See Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 154: "[Baudelaire] paid dearly for consenting to this disintegration ["of the aura in the experience of shock"] –but it is the law of his poetry, which shines in the sky of the Second Empire as 'a star without atmosphere.'" These are the very last words of the central Baudelaire essay. Benjamin cites from Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, 97: "All living things require an atmosphere around them, a mysterious misty vapour; if they are deprived of this envelope, if a religion, an art, a genius is condemned to revolve as a star without atmosphere, we should no longer be surprised if they quickly wither and grow hard and unfruitful."

² OC I: 73/CV, 155-6; translation Francis Scarfe's.

Not even an enormous chest of drawers stuffed with
 accounts and verses, love-letters and law-suits,
 Drawing-room ballads,
 And heavy plaits of hair rolled in receipts, has fewer
 secrets
 To hide than has my unhappy brain. It is a pyramid, a
 vast
 Burial-vault, more packed with dead than any charnel-
 house.
 I am a graveyard that the Moon abhors, in which
 Long worms crawl like remorse, always batten on
 Those dead I hold most dear. I am a bygone boudoir
 Full of faded roses, in which a medley of old-fashioned
 Dresses lie scattered everywhere, with only the
 Plaintive pastels and pale Boucher canvases to breathe
 The fragrance of a scent-bottle left uncorked

A dazzling thematic and associative wealth renders this *Spleen* poem particularly apposite to a discussion on memory, temporality and history especially since it overtly entwines memory with the reality of reification. Eugene Holland alerts us to the poem's hyperbolisation of the anamnestic act causing a situation where the narrator's memories become not only infinite but subject to a temporal elongation that encroaches upon horizontal temporality's potential for the encasement of experience. "J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans [I have more memories than if I had lived a thousand years]" echoes a paroxysmic mnemonic impetus. The metaphoric axis connecting the narrator to a number of emblems of memories ("un gros meuble," "une pyramide," "un immense caveau") switches to the positioning of spatial equivalents for the narrating subject³ which bear sinister undertones of vacuous depth: "--Je suis un cimetière abhorré de la lune [I am a cemetery abhorred by the moon]," "un vieux boudoir." Gradually the landscape

³ See Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 87-8.

of reification is narratively insinuated in a way that links it inextricably with the mortified body and the reduction of reference to mere gesture. “Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées [I am an old boudoir full of faded roses]” is inflected to the defiant apostrophe: “—Désormais tu n’est plus, ô matière vivante! [-- Henceforth you are no more, O living matter!].” The way the abortion of memory-retrieval impacts subjectivity is put into relief through the transformation of living matter into inanimate stone.

Rien n'égale en longueur les boiteuses journées,
 Quand sous les lourds flocons des neigeuses années
 L'ennui, fruit de la morne incuriosité,
 Prend les proportions de l'immortalité.
 --Désormais tu n'est plus, ô matière vivante!
 Qu'un granit entouré d'un vague épouvante,
 Assoupi dans le fond d'un Sahara~~///~~ brumeux;
 Un vieux Sphinx ignoré d'un monde insoucieux,
 Oublié sur la carte, et don~~t~~ l'humeur farouche
 Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil qui se couche.⁴

Nothing could 'be as long-drawn-out as the limping
 days, When under the heavy flakes of the snowy years,
 Boredom, the fruit of sullen indifference,
 Takes on the proportions of immortality.
 Henceforth, O living matter, you are but a granite form
 Shrouded in vague horror, listlessly sunken in the
 Depths of a mist-bound Sahara, an old Sphinx
 Unknown to the uncaring world, forgotten on the map,
 And whose grim humour is to sing only in the rays of
 The setting sun.

Benjamin has already identified this process as “empathy with inorganic things.”⁵ He gives it a historicist twist by explaining it as “matter that has been eliminated from the circulation process.”⁶ In the context of the discussed tension

⁴ OC I: 73/CV, 156; translation Francis Scarfe's.

⁵ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 55.

⁶ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 56.

between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, Benjamin's perspective imposes a historical accent on what he himself had already determined in terms that affirmed both the primary agency of mnemonic-linguistic mechanisms and of the controlling socio-symbolic milieu. His insistence on historical determination is not always immune to a reflexive model of understanding the interimplication of text and social reality and tends to slur over inherent rhetorical exigencies. It also takes insufficient account of the incommensurability of experience and (historical/temporal) context that defines trauma, that is, the traumatic impact of temporality and finitude that the narrating subjects attempt to ward off. His emphasis inevitably diminishes the history of intertextual entanglements that determine, to a certain extent, the examined work.⁷ Benjamin tries to historicise an allegorical text that is sceptical of the possibility of embedding experience within a historical framework in a way that would exhaust its semantic potential. Baudelaire's discourse exposes the factitiousness undergirding all bipolar/binomial arrangements and is mistrustful of the logic that reduces the text to an instrument that reflectively registers (its) historical circumstances. The text problematises the reliance on memory that is prerequisite to the embedment of experience within a historical seriality. The text's determination by factors that resist the full grasp of historicist appropriations, however, does not indicate that it is created in a historical vacuum but testifies to a constitutive aporia and indeterminacy recognised by modern experience.

Another point concerning Benjamin's analyses is that he offers a partial "corrective" to his historicist emphases in his *Arcades Project*. Therein he

⁷ On intertextual rapports in the text, see OC I: 976.

combines a stunning awareness of historical environments with an archaeology of inter-textual influences. As always with Benjamin the abundance of insights is overwhelming and the reader is challenged to unfold the intricate counterpoint of his texts and read them *as if* they complemented, and responded to, one another.⁸ I must, however, declare what I regard as a source of friction in his analyses. His recourse to a Freudian understanding of memory and trauma (the division into voluntary/involuntary memory, the inscription of traumatic mnemonic traces when the protective shield of consciousness is caught “off guard,” the whole psychoanalytic vocabulary in his Baudelaire essays) raises the issue of the relation of traumatic memory to the collective and historical character of human recollection. His understanding of memory on the basis of the conjunction of personal memories and the communal commemoration of collectively shared experiences within the body of a community affirms the primacy of the inscription of mnemonic contents on the basis of a commonality of political and ethical values, and within collective imaginaries. All these are positively valorised. Benjamin laments the dispersion of values and codes that could stabilise memory and reduce or absorb trauma. However, I see Baudelaire’s poetry as refusing to do that. Baudelaire’s ambivalence vis-à-vis the non-transmissibility of experience points to his awareness of the non-conjunctural dimension of this condition. This is not an endorsement of ontological destiny but the realisation that within the mechanisms of language and memory the inscription of experience along horizontal lines necessary to the stabilisation of collective identities and imaginaries is far from certain, and in no way reflects non-contingent fundamentals

⁸ See Walter Benjamin, “Konvolut J: Baudelaire,” in *The Arcades Project*, 228-387.

of essence. This is the way in which Baudelaire's poetic production exceeds its historical circumscriptions. Again, this does not mean that it cannot be given a certain historical recognition as an event. The poetry renders imperative, however, that one re-negotiate one's understanding of what identity means, its phantasmatic and exclusionary foundations.

Mnemonic reification is seen by Benjamin to be not simply, or not primarily, the outcome of a process of content-disintegration consequent upon the embedment of traumatic experience in a pseudo-temporal horizontal schema. This integration serves to alleviate trauma by defusing the memory traces of their pathogenic, ego-dismantling force (the logic of *Erlebnis* disguising itself as *Erfahrung*; the logic of psychoanalytic treatment, as well). He also understands reification to be the necessary outcome of the market-oriented mode of existence monitoring all layers of social life and human production. There is nothing inherently fallacious in the amplification of the causes and significance of reification and its more historico-political inflections provided that one understands that Baudelaire's poetic praxis has anticipated its historicist appropriations, and has thematically ingrained them in and through its contractual and dialogical character and its metafigural awareness.⁹ Reification in Baudelaire accommodates both the itemisation and commodification of human experience due to economic and political reasons and the disintegration of experiential contents caused by the semiotic character of language and memory. The latter dimension turns more clearly visible in the vicinity of (modern) trauma.

⁹ From the introductory "Au Lecteur [To the Reader]" (OC I: 5-6) to the more overtly contractual poems of the *Révolte* section history clamours at the door of this poetry. One of the primary traits of lyric poetry, i.e., its monological, soliloquising character, is thus bracketed.

Benjamin's analyses bear upon the dual aspect of reification in Baudelaire's poetry, which explains why he conjugates Freudian psychoanalysis with historical determinism. Still, he does not account for the way in which traumatic experience and its correlate mnemonic flash-backs problematise the past/present relation upon which a historicist explanation must depend. Trauma invalidates the evidentiary force behind the witnessing and communicability of a social reality and eludes the retrospective linear and historiographic classification of events. In addition to that, an analytical model that insists on the historicist susceptibilities of texts in terms of their bearing witness to historical reality does not resolve the difficulty of circumscribing, and then transcending, the designated historical environments in order to determine their specificities and their control over the artistic product. One cannot jump from text to reality as if they inhabit a zone wherein their reciprocal recognition and illumination is possible.

Benjamin never infantilises the textual realm to an epiphenomenon of historico-economic infrastructures. However, the ambivalent way in which he lumps fragments of a psychoanalytic theory of trauma with insights ingrained with a certain historical determinism glosses over the potentially anti-historicist dimensions of the psychoanalytic rationale or the aspects of it that move beyond an exhaustive historicist annexation. First, it is the "personal," individual intrapsychically generated processing of modern traumatic reality that does not resonate well with Benjamin's more communal, "calendar" screening of historical events and personal histories. The latter make sense (or should make sense, according to Benjamin's implied injunction) through the conjugation of personal experience with commonly absorbed shock-insulating experiential frameworks.

The psychoanalytic accounts of (traumatic) memory do not entirely preclude the societal dimension but must hold it in abeyance in order to focus, instead, on the intra-psychic belabouring of reality. Second, in the psychoanalytic account of experience-processing there is a modicum of immutability with respect to the psychic processes involved. The influence of external reality on the individual is not, of course, shunned, yet the subject is regarded as struggling with a reality, and with means, which elude his conscious control. I do not believe that this antinomy is resolved by Benjamin's assertion that the cementing of collective consciousness is more or less unconscious.¹⁰

The subject/patient is, according to the traditional psychoanalytical versions to which Benjamin seems to point, constituted at the crossroads between external reality and internal psychic mobility, and is thus manipulated by them. It is not argued here that psychoanalytical insights and a historicist perspective are *de facto* mutually exclusive since there have been instances of a successful rapprochement of the two in the Deleuzian angle of Eugene Holland, and others. Lacan's enhancement of the mediatory role of language vis-à-vis the negotiation of reality can serve as a bridge rendering the two zones apposite to each other. Considering human desire orbital to the linguistic dimension encroaches upon the grafting of individual experience onto qualities of a collective, which is what transpires in the case of more anthropological versions of psychoanalysis, family triads and oedipal plots including. Psychoanalysis has had various branches and its vicissitudes seem to have no final exit. Nevertheless, the tension between the two analytical modes must be registered especially since they are brought to

¹⁰ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 185: "Experience ... [is] a convergence in memory of accumulated and often not conscious data."

proximity by Benjamin in the context of a discussion of personal and more communal accounts of experience, memory, and history. I contend that Benjamin's conjunction of Freudian psychoanalysis and his unorthodox version of historicist determinism slurs over the potentially disturbing incongruence of the two and refrains from acknowledging the resistance to historicist, cumulative integrations that traumatic memory entails.¹¹ Still, Benjamin himself writes that Baudelaire's poetry concerns a time that is *geschichtslos* ["without history"].¹² The Baudelaire essay's concluding lines resonate with insightful ambivalence and call for an act of reading that will do justice to Benjamin's creative irresolution: "[Baudelaire] indicated the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock. He paid dearly for consenting to this disintegration -- but it is the law of his poetry, which shines in the sky of the Second Empire as 'a star without atmosphere.'" ¹³ A "star without atmosphere" signals a phenomenon in complete isolation from any surrounding or enveloping environment. As such it cannot be historicisable.

¹¹ Michel Foucault has, however, brought the historical determinations of psychoanalysis to the fore. Analysis has constitutively been captive to the antinomy between the affirmation of natural, extra-historical givens and the shaping of the human subject by historical forces. See his *History of Sexuality*, vol. I: *An Introduction*, 159. He arraigns the emancipatory illusions of psychoanalysis: "...the good genius of Freud placed it [sex] at one of the critical points marked out for it since the eighteenth century by the strategies of knowledge and power ... in giving a new impetus to the secular injunction to study sex and transform it into discourse." Cited in Jacques Derrida, "To Do Justice to Freud," in *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, 112. Foucault's stance towards psychoanalysis was not unwavering. In general, the tendency was critical climaxing in his ultimate project, *The History of Sexuality*. Nevertheless, any attempt to grasp the tensional relation of Foucault to psychoanalysis must take into continuous account *The Order of Things*, especially pages 373-76. Analysis is there seen to entangle with representation and finitude in a way that overflows the former and embraces the latter.

¹² Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 143.

¹³ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 154. He quotes from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, 97. Nietzsche's "atmosphere," however, protectively envelops "a religion," "an art, a genius" from historicist dissection allowing them, thus, to live and grow. It could be that Benjamin implies that Baudelaire's poetry is open to history, and consciously so. Within the broader context of reference, however, one gets the feeling that it is the isolation, the shock-like non-assimilability of the work that Benjamin cryptically addresses.

The deployment of historicist circumscriptions at the service of poetic hermeneutics addressing the poetry of an author like Baudelaire makes clearer their limitations. The binomial logic of immanence/transcendence within which historicism moves has already been anticipated, thematised and problematised by the examined poetry. Baudelaire's moratorium against the dialectical resumption of experiential fragments incapacitates reading acts that presuppose signifiers to be adequate expressions of their signifieds or perfect embodiments of the conceptual paradigms that they put forth.¹⁴ No latent essence can be deciphered negatively, dialectically, or otherwise, to which manifest contents could be referable. Baudelaire's poetry leverages a reality where desire and memory galvanise subjects not into action in the pragmatic sense, but into an exit-less pursuit of cognitive territorialisation. This pursuit never winds up as an indirect confirmation of an egocentric ontology of life.

"Spleen LXXVI" also addresses "the necessary but noncomplementary relations, or better, interferences, between tropological structures of cognition and the material forces of inscription [that] could therefore never result in a chronological pattern of sequential and continuous movements."¹⁵ It does so by gearing the dynamics of memory towards the apostrophised sphinx that serves as a semi-anthropomorphic trope not, ultimately, for the act of remembering, but for irreversible forgetting. It shapes up as the abrupt petrification of sense into

¹⁴ On the contrary, the unimpeded fusion of signifier and signified that symbolism promises cannot be supported through the allegorical mode. See Richard Stamelman, "The Shroud of Allegory: Death, Mourning, and Melancholy in Baudelaire's Work," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 25 (1983): 390-409. He writes: "Allegory represents an alterity with which it can never coincide" (398).

¹⁵ Kevin Newmark, "Paul de Man's History," in *Beyond Symbolism: Textual History and the Future of Reading* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 225.

literarity, the sense-less materiality of the letter. Its hieratic immobility enhances what de Man regards as "the dismemberment of the aesthetic whole into the unpredictable play of the literary letter."¹⁶ The granite marmoreality that permeates the text is a mute statement as to the failure to cognise.¹⁷ By implication, it testifies to the impossibility of synthesising mnemonic referents into a coherent history, that is, the impossibility of effecting their symbolic binding. What Kevin Newmark writes apropos of the "Correspondances" can also be said with regard to "Spleen LXXVI": "History ... for de Man as well as for Baudelaire is therefore a *textual* process governed by laws that would be proper to the acts of inscription and reading rather than a natural process patterned on the chronological continuity and change of empirical entities."¹⁸

Baudelaire inflects hypertrophic memory ("J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans") to literal amnesia ("Un vieux sphinx ... oublié sur la carte") eliciting thus the understanding that the grammar of memory is not commensurate to its semantics. The assumption is not that the subject does not remember; he does so, but it is the semantic value of memory that is ultimately at stake.¹⁹ Memory is not expected to retrieve the core of past events as world occurrences. Memory is itself censorious, literal, material occurrence and this is what the petrified sphinx-emblem conveys. In its *lethic* defiance and isolation, "ignoré du

¹⁶ De Man, "Reading and History," in *The Resistance to Theory*, 70.

¹⁷ Cf. de Man's "[a]llegorical narratives tell the story of the failure to read" in *Allegories of Reading*, 205; cited in Newmark, "Paul de Man's History," 221, fn. 16. De Man has substantially elaborated upon the disjunction between cognition and linguistic performance.

¹⁸ Newmark, "Paul de Man's History," 224.

¹⁹ Memory, in the sense of a letting-emerge of the anterior and aleatory, as the material inscription of idea dissociated from meaning, "effaces remembrance (or recollection) just as the I effaces itself" (Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," 773). The Baudelairean subject engages in an anamnestic endeavour that "materially inscribes, and thus forever forgets, its ideal content" (774).

monde insoucieux [ignored by an indifferent world],” it “voices” the constant alienation that persists in and as sense.

Reification and Memory: the extinction of the anamnestic/historical subject.

What Barbara Johnson’s analyses have found at the core of the prose poems is there in the *Spleen* sequence as well, that is, a structural undercurrent that leads to an irreversible freezing of the lyrical, affective register and a prosaic explicitation of the textual literacy.²⁰ The crystal-clear character of the factitiousness at the core of the textual givens is the outcome of the comprehension of the reified character of both external reality and perceiving consciousness. Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*²¹ and the Baudelaire essays addressed the reality of reification in all its socio-economic determinations and linked it to an alteration of the perceptual/conceptual horizon of the modern subject. What is visible within the latter, according to him, is a self-estrangement ensuing upon the serialisation of experience that capitalism enforces, along with the annexation of all organic life to the sphere of the inorganic. Optic and tactile experiences are adjusted to the exigencies of shock-defence. The *flâneur*, i.e., the leisurely city stroller, gradually cedes his place to the amorphous and neurotic mass of the crowd. The network of reification that Walter Benjamin analyses sensitises the Baudelairean poetry to the emblematic character of the prostitute, the lesbian, the gambler, and the factory-worker. His is a poetics of sterility and

²⁰ See Johnson, *Défigurations de langage poétique*, 40, for an instance of “explicitation de ... l’écriture.”

²¹ Benjamin, “Konvolut N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress,” 456-88 passim.

intransitivity that deploys the allegorisation of the above figures in an overall strategy of enciphering an already fragmented and commodified (historical) existence. The prostitution of the living body to the inorganic world,²² the empathy with the commodity, all point to the enabling conditions of this poetry: "The devaluation of the world of objects in allegory is outdone within the world of objects itself by the commodity."²³ There is nothing immanently psychological for Benjamin that cannot be revealed to be historically conditioned.²⁴ At the same time, however, I believe that what this historical understanding negatively responds to, if not renders more visible, is the dissolution of historical linearity and historical memory. And this is exactly the point where what seem to be quite orthodox and more or less dialectical materialist analyses collide with their own enabling ground which they had been trying to conceal. Civic memory is seen by Benjamin to be the correlate of phenomenological, psychological memory, with its division into volitional and non-volitional memory, its logic of a Proustian *mémoire involontaire*, its screen-memories, its *après-coup* investments of events with meaning, the non-commensurability of event and remembrance. At this point the tension between the voluntary and involuntary character of memories comes to overflow both Baudelaire's poetry and Benjamin's analyses, the oscillations of whom concerning the putative capacity of involuntary memory to recognise and/or retrieve experiential traces indicates the unavoidable implication of reification in any mnemonic act *per se*. It also reflects the

²² See Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 166.

²³ Benjamin, "Central Park," 34.

²⁴ Even impotence in men bears a historical index according to Benjamin. Sexuality is perforated by economic and political exigencies as can be seen by his response to Baudelaire's configuration of the lesbian. See "Central Park," 36, 39 respectively.

incompatibility of deterministic and psychoanalytic vocabularies. The paroxysmic character of the Baudelairean memories ("J'ai plus de mémoires que si j'avais mille ans [I am fuller of memories than if I had lived a thousand years"]) is an index to the defensive formation of consciousness in its retroactive attempts at mastering traumatic mnemonic overload. Benjamin recognises the defensive character of this consciousness in the human automaton of the jostling crowd performing a ritual of shock-defence jerky movements. The whole schema is reduced to the Freudian formula postulating the incompatibility of consciousness and the essential retention/retrievability of memory traces. Benjamin translates this into Proustian terms: "Put in Proustian terms, this means that only what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject as an experience, can become a component of the *mémoire involontaire*."²⁵ It is therefore non-volitional memory that has the capacity to retrieve the core of inscribed experience, and not the strained voluntary recollection. Therefore, the question arises vis-à-vis the very foundations of modern subjectivity and historical intelligibility, since they both accrue to a mnemonic and testimonial integration of experience: is genuine historical memory, and by extension its commensurate subjectivity, at all possible, not only in the context of a capitalist organisation of perception that has forced human responsiveness to degenerate into a series of spasmodic shock-defences, but most importantly, is it possible *sui generis* as a retrieval of experiential meaning? The answer cannot be unconditionally affirmative if one considers that the disintegration of the experiential content is granted whenever the incident is

²⁵ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 114.

repressed or activated after an incubation period, as in the case of trauma, or even when the incident meets with an "alert" perceptual mechanism ready to process it or relegate it to the mnemonic depository. The mortification of past-matrices in Baudelaire, and the quantal and reified character of his memory morsels, point to a condition that exceeds the socio-economic determinations of the era in which he lived, and which (condition) is related to the factitiousness undergirding *all* memory acts. Herein lies the emblematic force of his modernist awareness.

Consequently, the transparency of Walter Benjamin's historically-oriented analytics of memory to psychoanalytically investigated infrastructures of memory solicits an insight that Benjamin resisted for reasons that can only be strategic. There has never been, and cannot be, any reification-free anamnestic act. The subject of the *mémoire involontaire*, the subject of the Baudelairean *correspondances*, struggles to embed lived or witnessed events within pseudo-temporal narratives.²⁶ On the other hand, in the case of shock-defence alertness, what is aimed at is the defusal of pathogenic force accompanying a traumatic event. Put in other terms, the paradox confronting any possible attempt at salvaging empirical contents in and through memory lies in the following: an *unconscious* inscription of experience leaves behind memory traces that can be retrieved only through involuntary memory. But, by necessity, and even if one bypasses the fact that the non-volitional haphazard character of this mnemonic praxis is not adequate to the demands of historical alertness, the only "content" that can be said to inhere in these memory traces cannot be immanent, but strictly

²⁶ See Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 154. Benjamin relates Baudelaire's "impotent rage" to the attempt to create a sense of collective experience out of individually lived life moments: "This is the nature of something lived through (*Erlebnis*) to which Baudelaire has given the weight of an experience (*Erfahrung*)."

mnemonic (i.e., perpetually reconstituted *après-coup*, or rather constituted by the very act of recall itself). On the other hand, the residual content-potential of an experience *consciously* registered has always already been exhausted because of the wilful character of its elaboration by an alarmed consciousness, which (elaboration) emanates from the necessities of a shock-defence psychology. What the reminiscing subject reaffirms, in Baudelaire's poetry, is not the capitalist reification of a pre-lapsarian mnemonic and experiential homogeneity, but, quite to the contrary, the ineradicable cleavage precluding any unabridged communication, and in any medium, between past and present.

I contend that the melancholia that this awareness gives off is not the indication of a political incapacitation, as Max Pensky would have it,²⁷ but the effect of an enhanced insight into the dystopic infrastructures of a memory that labours to accommodate historical existence and assign personal experience a historical index. He believes that Baudelaire's allegorical mode does not translate a real insight into actual socio-economic conditions, and that melancholia ultimately frustrates the allegorical recognition of the true nature of objects. For Pensky Baudelaire failed to grasp the rootedness of the relationship of correspondences to his own allegorical system in terms of the emergent socioeconomic physiognomy of high capitalism. According to his hermeneutic scenario memory was mobilised in the poetry to archive the traces of unalienated nature as a response to the commodification of experience under modern conditions. A self-crippling melancholia steps in when it is ultimately realised that the gulf between real and allegorical nature, between the objective/divine and

²⁷ See Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 178.

the allegorical/arbitrary set of natural signs cannot be bridged by the poetic subject. In summary terms, Baudelairean melancholy is due, according to Pensky, to the necessity and impossibility of encapsulating the immediacy of experience in and through correspondences via the mediate, temporal, discursive poetic activity.²⁸ "Memory is both the medium of the correspondences and the bitterness that kills them."²⁹ *Pace* Pensky, I have aimed to show that the pervasiveness of melancholia in Baudelaire is the outcome of an enhanced awareness that exceeds topical historical conjunctures without eliding them, but that also interrogates the conceptual infrastructures uncritically taken for granted by various historicisms, materialist or other. This awareness augurs a historical stance that refuses to congeal into complacent normativity, and manages to explore the interstices between event and representation, force and signification, verbalised and poetically enacted event. Baudelaire's centrality for the understanding of modern subjectivity is reaffirmed in his elaboration of a supra-historical rhetorical and mnemonic depletion of essentiality that does not, however, succumb to a determined ahistoricism.

Adorno's contentions apropos of Kafka seem to apply well to Baudelaire's case, and are particularly relevant when it comes to addressing a critique as subtle as that of Pensky. Adorno writes that " [Kafka's] language is the instrument of that configuration of positivism and myth that has only now become obvious socially. Reified consciousness, which presupposes and confirms the inevitability and immutableness of what exists, is --as the heritage of the ancient spell-- the new form of the myth of the ever-same. Kafka's epic style is, in its archaism,

²⁸ See Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 178-83.

²⁹ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 183.

mimesis of reification."³⁰ Baudelairean melancholia emanates from this lyrical-aesthetic mimesis of reification and translates a dimension of *negativity toward its own immediacy*, regardless of whether the latter is understood in terms of response to "primary material" or the resuscitation of inalienable nature and experience through the correspondences portfolio. Melancholia is the outcome of a non-deluded metabolic exchange with social reality that admits of the collective subject not in the form of reflected content, but as the instantiation of form as "the locus of social content [*Gehalt*]."³¹

All these observations do not aim at disputing the validity of Benjamin's analyses but intend to highlight Baudelaire's acuity towards, and refusal to deploy, either historicist or purely psychologistic accounts of human experience and memory. The destruction of aura and communal imaginaries is a historically recognisable phenomenon. However, Baudelaire's poetry problematises its exclusive historical appointment and shows it not to be exhausted in its integration into a chronological, linear schema.³² The perforation of *idéal* by *spleen* implies that this predicament exceeds a temporally delimited historical assignation. This excess, however, does not entail its reduction to destiny or ontology. Baudelaire's

³⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 230; emphasis added.

³¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 230. See also 225-35. My understanding of Baudelaire's negativity ("resistance") towards the immediacy of content and experience, and the way it never degenerates into ahistoric ontology or myth, is partially indebted to Adorno. On page 231 he writes: "By constantly admitting into the production of his work an element of negativity toward his own immediacy, the artist *unconsciously* obeys a social universal: in every successfully realized correction, watching over the artist's shoulder is *a collective subject that has yet to be realised*" (emphasis added).

³² Benjamin's implied positive valorisation of pre-capitalist, oral traditions and communal ways of making sense of one's reality and relating to one another, modulates around a nostalgia for the past while typically beautifying it. However, agrarian societies were beset with the violence that emanated from rigid social stratification and inflexible social rank. In distinction to Benjamin, Richard Wolin contends that "in truth, communal social organization was never so idyllic as modern romantics tend to imagine it. These were societies beset with problems of privation and scarcity, at the mercy of nature, where social rank was decided by birth, and in which formal legal

refusal to lament the collapse of memory and the collective coding of experience, along with the pervasive melancholia of his poetry, are negative pointers to his awareness that there has never been a pre-lapsarian plenitude of representation or a retrieval of past experience through memory and/or any other act of consciousness. Therefore, the interimplication of text and social reality that his poetry responds to must be accounted for in terms flexible enough to accommodate the notion of the text as trace (of language, the psychic/semiotic chora, reality, and other texts) and as *gesturing to* reality, demanding reality, instead of reflecting or *expressing*³³ it. Baudelaire's modern traumatic mnemonic scope is antithetical to an idealist apocatastasis of history.

channels to address injustice and grievances were highly underdeveloped" (Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1982], 227).

³³ See Benjamin, "Konvolut K: Dream City and Dream House, Dreams of the Future, ... Jung," 392: "The superstructure is the expression of the infrastructure. The economic conditions under which society exists are expressed in the superstructure.... The collective, from the first, expresses the conditions of its life. These find their expression in the dream and their interpretation in the awakening."

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CHALLENGE OF MELANCHOLY TO HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

[H]istory is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance {Eigendenken}. What science has "determined," remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete.

Benjamin, "Konvolut N"

The double face of history: panache or mystification?

In this chapter I shall set off from the contentions of Richard Terdiman regarding French modern poetry and Baudelaire. I find his views especially relevant to my previous discussion of the challenge for a historicist understanding of Baudelaire's production to take into account the poetry's calling into question the historicist premises that validate this understanding. Terdiman is sensitive to the rhetorical specificities and intertextual character of the texts he discusses while maintaining a historicist vocabulary throughout. I regard his work as a stimulus to understanding the broader context of reference, however, I am sceptical of the way in which he collapses the semiotic and aesthetic impetus of the examined poetry to an abortive response to the capitalist commodification of art. Terdiman exemplifies both the strengths and weaknesses of a particular branch of new literary historicism that has substantially enriched the debate on modern aestheticism. He fails, however, to acknowledge the constitutive aporia at the heart of poetic modernity, namely the effort to sustain the vocabulary of representation when the foundations of cognition and those linking representation

to it have been eroded. He interprets this *aporia* and its artistic and social effects in terms of the artistic subjects' political incapacitation and acquiescence in the moral and political order which they initially purported to overthrow. I argue that his stance is premised upon the reciprocal coding of experience and language in terms that will not account for the non-sublatable and non-conjunctural incommensurability of the two spheres.

Terdiman contends, apropos of what he determines as a crisis of recollection and a denaturalisation of memory in Baudelaire, that the reifying hollowing out of linear memory enforced by the capitalist societal organisation redefines history as the discipline of memory. History turns into the guarantor and registrar of the past to the extent that "natural" memory becomes evacuated.¹ A negative resonance, nevertheless, permeates his schema to the extent that, as he acknowledges, by "preserving" the past history turns into the place where the mnemonic crisis can be displaced and thus falsely mitigated. In terms I have deployed up to now, history comes to occult the individual and communal dispossession of the past and can potentially serve as the defensive homogenisation and essentialisation of *Abgrund*. The paradox of the dual valence of the historical dimension shows that history is not a panacea¹ a concept that can uncritically be used to counterbalance what some diagnose as "self-reflexiveness," "self-referential aestheticism," etc. History can itself serve as the medium through which ideology materialises and perpetuates itself in the form of a particular historical memory. Terdiman is content to contain this ideological history within

¹ See Terdiman, "Deconstructing Memory," 19-20.

the boundaries of ^{nineteenth-century} capitalism, disregarding the fact that strategic interests of concrete power coalitions have always underwritten any and all collective and mnemonic imaginaries and their historicist transcriptions. He primarily focuses on the loss of developmental memory, which he regards as endemic in bourgeois society. Because of this loss, he argues, no revelation of the historical determinants of social life and knowledge can be effected. This is more or less the social framework within which Baudelaire's poetic practice is crystallised and to which it responds by registering the new forms of non-organic perceptual modes and contents on the ascent. Terdiman's narrative rehearses the premise that aestheticism came to be consolidated as a self-deluded and abortive counter-hegemonic discourse. He refines some of the parameters already focalised by Benjamin yet remains ambivalently captive to a reflexive model of socio-political determinism that fails to encompass, and do full justice to, the aesthetic and political agenda of poetic modernity and its counter-discursive rigour. It must be said, however, that his analyses acquire a more empathetic inflection vis-à-vis the French modernists in his *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*.²

In his *Diacritics* article he perceives the adversative contents of Baudelaire's generic and formal innovations in the light of a capitalist reification of the associative structure of memory, the dispersion of social memory itself, and

² Richard Terdiman's, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985) translates the effort to reconcile a politically aware perspective with sensitivity to rhetorical-theoretical exigencies. Even though I cannot fully concur with Terdiman's overdetermination of the political/historical sphere, I cannot but recognise his insightful probing into the interimplication of the textual and the real dimensions. What is disturbing, though, is that nowhere does he fully acknowledge his debts to Walter Benjamin and Barbara Johnson, even though he makes extensive, and not so idiosyncratic, use of these two theorists' critical insights. Needless to say, behind almost every politically, and rhetorically, sensitive approach to Baudelaire's text lies Walter Benjamin.

the randomisation of mnemonic matrices. This latter is due to the alteration in the whole visual-perceptive horizon effected by the expansion of the press, the instrumentalisation of language, and the fabrication and banalisation of the contents of memory. In short, he configures the nature of poetic modernity as *defensive*. As regards memory, he emphasises that its socially induced reification led to the moderns' perception of it as a danger.³ The aestheticist paradox is gradually crystallised: "A culture whose memory was threatened perceived memory as a threat."⁴ This reaction is seen to be consonant with the Nietzschean radical obliteration of the past, which, he believes, gradually recoils into an entrenchment within language, a linguistic closure. Mallarmé serves as an example of this linguistic idealism for Terdiman, as a characteristic Nietzschean epigone. Proust is mobilised in this argumentative framework as another one for whom the reified character of the contents of recollection leads to their perception as a threat. He will supposedly respond to the latter through the elaboration of a mnemotechnics of involuntary memory. However, Proust's mnemonic alertness never degenerated into an operation of essence-retrieval.

Max Pensky refers to the reified character of Proustian memory fragments, memories that "appear also as the dead, suffocating mass of inert material, under which thought is crushed –memory in the form that Nietzsche saw it, as hostile to life."⁵ By juxtaposing Terdiman's and Pensky's accounts of this threatening memory and the reaction of the moderns to it, the contours of a sub-narrative subtending Nietzsche's rationale, and possibly Baudelaire's tactics, become

³ Terdiman, "Deconstructing Memory," 23.

⁴ Terdiman, "Deconstructing Memory," 24.

⁵ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 164. Pensky refers to Nietzsche's "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life," in *Untimely Meditations*; see esp. 62, 76.

visible. Terdiman configures the Nietzschean radical forgetfulness in distinction to a Marxian logic aiming at the radical supersession of the past in social revolution, and valorises positively the latter. This Marxian logic, according to Terdiman, did not erase the historical determination behind the radical gestures inherent in the obliteration of past life (but not history itself), and constituted a conscious dialectical response to the threat of reification and instrumentalisation. Pensky, on the other hand, seems to subsume both the Nietzschean and Marxian responses to memory-manipulation within a common post-Hegelian platform and radicalises the Marxian insistence on forgetting and its professed desaturation of social life from past determinations. He writes: "It [a liberating forgetting, "a purging of the mass of memory-laden objects"] is the common legacy of all mid-nineteenth-century, post-Hegelian philosophical critics who articulate their political or ethical theories under the condition of mass commodification. Marx also insists, in the 18th *Brumaire*, that the dead bury the dead lest the weight of the past bear down like a nightmare on the brains of the living."⁶ One sees here that it is a thin line between radical forgetfulness and an obliteration of the past that will not erase the hegemonic infrastructure within which the need to forget was induced in the first place, which erasure is what Terdiman accuses the Symbolists of having incurred.

The ambiguity of the Marxian manoeuvre seems to have eluded Terdiman, or at least he has strategically chosen not to address it. The injunction to conveniently erase those aspects of social life and history that are inimical to one's own agenda while retaining a dialectical relation to the past that will

⁶ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 164.

preserve a politically acute memory and the understanding of the institutional infrastructures within which opposition is engendered, sounds feeble when compared to the Nietzschean imperative. This latter in its historico-epistemic nihilism proves to be more aware of the internal contradictions fissuring any project of a radical disjunction of past and present and comes to draw its theoretical and practical impetus from these very contradictions. The Nietzschean agenda of counter-memory eschews the reassuring stigmatisation of some historical configurations and its concomitant extolment of power configurations normatively compatible to the interests at stake.⁷ I have juxtaposed the two conceptions of memory in order to emphasise the distinction between a convenient parcelling of historical memory (à la Terdiman) that still admits of chronological demarcations and Nietzsche's scepticism towards the viability of integrative memory within modernity. I believe that the aporiae to which the latter is vulnerable should not blind us to the self-serving character of the former, or to the pervasive presence of anti-organicism beneath most modern problematisations of developmental memory.

Richard Terdiman holds Baudelaire and the French *avant-garde* in general responsible for what he regards as an amnesic reification of language and memory deployed in a deluded fashion against a capital-induced social amnesia and reduction of use-value to exchange value. He indicts the moderns, in short, for displacing the reification they aimed at combating into the register of consciousness and language. He writes apropos of the radical forgetfulness

⁷ The seminal text by Nietzsche concerning memory and the historical sense is "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life," in *Untimely Meditations*, 59-123. See also, Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 42-3.

which, he believes, underlies aestheticism: "Language turns inward to evade its own 'materials memory.' Such a movement of active forgetting radicalises *genesis amnesia*, for it must forget the very past which has induced its need for forgetting." Transgressive and deinstrumentalised languages are "counter-discourses which would seek to forget the dominant discourse that situates them in their inevitable opposition."⁸ I argue *contra* Terdiman that the Baudelairean text addresses the contradictions inherent in the aesthetic agenda and thematises them in various rhetorical ways (allegory being the most effective one and capable of preserving a genuine historical awareness). I contend also that Baudelaire's poetry constitutes an anti-hegemonic discourse and practice in a more substantial and effective way than he concedes to it. Terdiman, following Benjamin obviously, takes for granted the capitalist disintegration of an overarching conceptual horizon that could bind the modern subjects' experiences into coherent wholes. He also concurs with Benjamin in recognising Baudelaire's poetry as a sensitive antenna registering this disintegration. What I regard as a contradiction in terms in his analyses, however, emanates from his resistance towards the inevitable consequences of the evaluated situation. The capital-induced destruction of a commonality of conceptual habits, moral customs, and co-shared social values makes impossible the meta-historical inscription of the subjects' experiences within the overarching horizontal conceptual nexus that is commonly called history. The destruction of a co-shared conceptual horizon invalidates the functionality of periodising integrative historiography. It is as if Terdiman, and to a lesser extent Benjamin, wilfully struggle to affirm the existence of the historical

⁸ Terdiman, "Deconstructing Memory," 25.

macro-sequence whose demise they admire Baudelaire for having adequately registered, at the epistemological or meta-historical, i.e., historicist, level. The hypothetically successful affirmation of this historical progression would presuppose the complete separation of the poetic and epistemological spheres and would assert the self-referential closure of the text, which is an unavoidably aestheticist premise and contravenes, therefore, the interimplication of text and reality that both Benjamin and Terdiman affirm. Either the fragmentation of experience and representation that the poetry addresses is a reality and inevitably has a retrograde bracketing effect on the horizontal periodisations of historicism, or it is a political fiction that serves other ends, which is, of course, not supposed to be the case. I believe that behind Terdiman's resistance to the inevitable consequences of the diagnosed non-transmissibility of experience upon a historicist configuration of (poetic and not only) modernity lies scepticism towards the viability of political praxis and conceptual integrity within conditions that cancel the pragmatic screening and transmission of experiential data. The implication of the issue with politics is obvious and points to the stakes involved in reading Baudelaire's poetry as much as to the necessary traversal of the aesthetic and political vistas that this reading mandates.

For Terdiman the Nietzschean hypercontrariety underlying the texts of Baudelaire and Mallarmé inaugurates the crisis of representation, which will be one of the central preoccupations of twentieth-century critical and poetic thought. In his failing to discriminate adequately between the different inflections that this crisis assumes in the differing cases of the poets above, though, he homogenises the self-reflexivity hypothetically latent in Baudelaire's texts with

the pulverisation of referentiality aimed at in Mallarmé. When he argues that the negation of temporality is endemic in the theory and practice of modernist self-reflexiveness he fails to recognise that in the case of Baudelaire, at least, the desire for the restitution of a natural, linear, developmental memory is explicitly addressed and then implied to be illusional and mystifying. Baudelaire explicitly addresses the issue of temporality which, however, he regards as a factor that obstructs the experiential plenitude that atemporal equivalences (of the correspondences type) would allegedly guarantee. I have already discussed the theme of the irretrievability of organically connected memory matrices and the correlate textual overdetermination of the melancholia triggered by their disintegration. This melancholia points to an irredeemable desperation of experience and exceeds by far the commonplace sadness permeating lyrical poetry. I have also shown how the infiltration of individual by collective experience (*Erfahrung*) and its recuperation are textually seen to be undercut by the materiality of meaning-crippling *Gedächtnis* and a manipulative, wilful *Erlebnis*. There is a wealth of textual experience here that cannot be levelled into “aesthetic intransitivity” or “aesthetic self-referentiality.” Baudelaire’s practice does not project an essential timelessness.⁹ Quite to the contrary, both the cynical irony and the melancholic allegories that Baudelaire deploys point to a liberatory admission of the semiotic dispersal of egological subjectivity and cognitive appropriations of experience, and register the particular historical inflections that a response to it assumes.

⁹ See Terdiman, “Deconstructing Memory,” 26.

Allegorical melancholia, temporality and correspondences

Within the framework of the discussion on civic memory and its eclipse, Terdiman regards *genesis amnesia* as the inevitable outcome of the modernist dissolution of all analytics of memory and history which Baudelaire's poetry allegedly transcribes and reinforces. Max Pensky, however, sees this putative obliteration of the historical terrain, the preservation of which is necessary for the opposition to capitalism and reification, as one of the poles in a tense dialectic which consists in the rejection *and* embrace of the past. What is generated through this dialectic is "a creative tension, a productivity in which the elements of the past surge forth." Pensky attributes this tension that is immanent to radical forgetfulness to a melancholic defensive strategy preferring a reified and factitious memory to the void left behind by the amnesic erasure of the past.¹⁰ It is a melancholic knowledge that is affirmed in the Baudelairean poetry of spleen and evilification.¹¹ The "thin atmosphere" (indicating the total void of knowledge or sense), just like Nietzsche's "star without atmosphere" that Benjamin used to describe Baudelaire's non-historicisable poetry, is a marker of the non-integratability of knowledge and experience. Knowledge, Pensky notes, comes to fill up the void which lurks behind the "hushed transcendence dwelling in rot and decay, or the lush, literal contours of sin and grace, of eroticism and monstrosity contained in the form of the human body, of the endless compaction

¹⁰ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 164.

¹¹ "Under the weight of memory, the subject is pulled into the tide in which each fragment, overlaid with memory, appears as a potential correlate to every other; every word with every image, every image with every word. Meaning opens up the 'abyss of knowledge.' Knowledge may be dead; it may, as Nietzsche warns, clog up and weigh down the mind; it might even be the very foundation of resentment. But for the melancholic it is infinitely preferable to the celebration of the void that its deprivation would leave behind, the thin atmosphere that Nietzsche wishes to learn to breathe" (Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 164-5).

of emotions contained in the glance.”¹² Melancholia is here given a cognitive and historical twist. I read Pensky as indicating the immanence of history to Baudelaire’s modern melancholia and as implying the irrelevance of an existentialist or psychologistic account of the ambivalence that the melancholic stance entails. All these issues bring to the fore the centrality of the allegorical mode of reasoning for Baudelaire and the interimplication of allegory with melancholia that is the consistent caveat of his poetry. Benjamin recapitulates this interimplication this way:

Melancthon’s term *melancolia illa heroica* (this heroic melancholy) characterizes Baudelaire’s gift most perfectly. Melancholy bears in the 19th century a different character, however, to that which it bore in the 17th. The key figure of the early allegory is the corpse. The key figure of the later allegory is the “souvenir” (*Andenken*). The “souvenir” is the schema of the transformation of the commodity into a collector’s object. The *correspondances* are the endlessly multiple resonances of each *souvenir* with all the others.¹³

The extent to which the mnemonic dimension exposes correspondences to temporality, or the degree to which this latter is subsumed under the suspension of linear time, is an issue fraught with ambivalence. Benjamin’s uneasy conjunction of inner mnemonic psychodramas with a deterministic model of communal-versus-individual recollections, points to the difficulty of arresting the contents to which the texts lend themselves. A careful analysis of the inflections that a term such as “temporality” can accommodate is called for. Understanding what is involved in the temporal mutations that Baudelaire’s poetry registers is imperative if one is to clarify the mnemonic instability that the poetry probes into.

¹² Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 165.

¹³ Benjamin, “Central Park,” 55; cited in Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 175.

The factor that mediates the relation between memory, correspondences, and temporality, is allegorical melancholia. It underwrites the hopelessness of the project of preserving organically/serially linked experiential grids and the mind/nature homology through the correspondences. Pensky implies this in his comments on Benjamin's dictum that "what Baudelaire meant by *correspondance* may be described as an experience which seeks to establish itself in crisis-proof form."¹⁴ He writes that "this is a melancholy realization, and *the hopeless demand to preserve and muster the moments of correspondence against the time in which they must appear* is the poetic heart of Baudelaire's heroic melancholy. The correspondences, as moments of divine meaning, are to stand outside of the range of the contemplative –brooding—subject. They are, in this way, presented as theologically distinct from the allegorical images."¹⁵ Correspondences, I may add, look as if they seek to establish themselves as a *time-proof experience*, as well. I believe that the extent to which they successfully ward off time or not is dependent on whether recollection can be seen to be a temporal act (perhaps the temporal act *par excellence*) or not. I agree with Benjamin when he implies that correspondences are internally punctuated by temporality: "There are no simultaneous correspondences, such as were cultivated by the symbolists later."¹⁶ One facet of the paradox internally fissuring the correspondences programme is gradually delineated. To the extent that they are "the data of remembrance" and

¹⁴ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 182.

¹⁵ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 177; emphasis added.

¹⁶ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 178.

“the murmur of the past may be heard in the correspondences,” and to the extent that “the canonical experience of them has its place in a previous life,”¹⁷ they are permeated by the immanent difference that undergirds and fixes the poles of a *mnemonic* reproduction trajectory taking place *within time*, no matter how atomistic, fictive, or socially sequestered it may be. Therefore, the organicist prerogative with which correspondences have traditionally been accredited, that of collapsing the ontological and temporal difference between perception, cognition, and expression, and the temporal articulations of perceived and cognised events, proves to be *de facto* abortive. The traditional symbolist understanding of correspondences has invested in the erasure of temporality, which (temporality) organicist aesthetics regard as inimical to the retrieval of experiential essences through empathetic memory. Baudelaire’s answer to this rationale is his explicit addressing of the issue of temporality in terms that may be ambiguous but that do not allow for the empathetic cementing of experience through memory. From “L’Horloge” to “Le Voyage,” the remembered happenings are either staged as *scenes* with their factitiousness showing through, or are internally hollowed out by temporal distances that cannot be breached through empathy.

One of the reasons why empathetic retrieval is impossible is that the collective dimension that mediates and cements the subjects’ memories has been irreversibly shattered. Involuntary memory turns out to be one’s “private show.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 141.

¹⁸ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 145, fn. 80. See also p. 113: “[*mémoire involontaire*] is part of the inventory of the individual who is isolated in many ways. Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past. The rituals with their ceremonies, their festivals [are] quite probably nowhere recalled in Proust’s work.” Therefore, non-volitional memory within a shattered commonality of values is unable to salvage, restore and integrate the gist of past experience. The presuppositional thread behind Benjamin’s assumptions is that the destruction of collective imaginaries is the outcome of concrete historical configurations and, therefore, the crisis is not destinal but potentially reversible.

Benjamin continually oscillates between the necessity to purge involuntary memory of its social insularism and the tendency perpetually germinal in his project to hypostasise an imaginary social collective.¹⁹ Baudelaire's textual practice, however, points to another force that is contributory to mnemonic dispersion, and which Benjamin and his followers have chosen to disregard. The linguistic chora that mediates and monitors the passage from perception to cognition frustrates the mutual adequacy of consciousness and experience and bars access to either "genuine" recollection or a recapturing of experiential plenitude through it. The relays between remembered "events" obey a semiotic logic. The putting in inverted commas of any notion of "genuine" cores of experience is a pervasive concern of the poetry, and its lyrico-allegorical working through its primary tactic.

According to Benjamin's rationale, the patterns of collective memory have succumbed to disintegration as a consequence of the modern alterations in the politico-economic and perceptual processing of reality. Therefore, the subject's memories have been unhinged from the collective's horizon of its past that could help shape and validate these memories. Empathy with the past is not a matter of individual choice, but must be enabled and sanctioned by community tradition.

¹⁹ Theodor Adorno's remarks apropos of the spurious and derived character of both individuality and collectivity are relevant: "If I reject the notion of the collective consciousness, it is naturally not in order to leave the 'bourgeois individual' intact as an authentic *substratum*. The interior should be made transparent as a social function and its self-containedness should be revealed as illusion. As illusion, however, not vis-à-vis a hypostasised collective consciousness, but vis-à-vis the real social process itself. The 'individual' is a dialectical channel which may not be mythologised away but can only be sublated [*aufgehoben*]." See *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem & T.W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson & Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 502. Adorno's emphasis on wider societal mediations does not seem to take sufficient account of the way language globally underlies as much as frustrates *Aufhebung*. See also Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), 236. Adorno stresses Benjamin's failure to elucidate phenomena as products of the social whole, and his relating them *directly*, that is, *unmediatedly*, to material and social processes.

Empathy outside of this sphere yields to mythology. Benjamin's assertions concerning the social fibre of experience slur over the ideological parameter endemic in *any* empathetic reconstruction of experience, whether in the midst of vital communal frameworks or not. "Experience is indeed a matter of tradition, in collective existences as well as private life. It is less the product of facts firmly anchored in the memory than of a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently not conscious data," he writes.²⁰ But the alterations in the objective conditions of existence which he laments do not necessarily signal the end of all conceptional and mnemonic commonality. They may enable *other* modes of constructing mnemonic identifications and fabricating subjectivity the real or virtual character of which can be determined not in immanent terms but within the binding premises of one's political norms. No one can seriously claim to be able to retrieve an experience that has not been mediated by the social body and channelled through its collective imaginaries. Still, to claim or imply that the modern era suffers from a post-lapsarian inability to mnemonically and experientially allow for self-understanding and self-presence translates adherence to an ontology of being that ultimately contravenes the historicist fiat that *every* human understanding of self and other is conjunctural, contingent, reversible. The ambivalence subtending the correspondence agenda testifies to the need to preserve some sense of experiential coherence in social conditions that forbid this very preservation and not, as the advocates of organicist aesthetics would have it, the possibility of salvaging experiential matrices through the levelling of temporal distances. Baudelaire, however, does not write from a vantage point of nostalgia

²⁰ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 185.

for an irretrievable past, but exposes the phantasmatic dimensions of *all* relation to what has been. His poetry *perfects* the past in the dual sense of refining it as and through memory, and revealing the mutual closure of past and present.

Pensky schematises the other internal paradox voiding the correspondence programme. The drive underlying it implies, first, the wilful assignment of meaning upon a world that has been perceived as irredeemably fragmented and, second, the visibility of elements of transcendent meaning that the melancholy subjectivity conceives as being metaintentional.²¹ The representation of these moments of transcendence within the medium of language, their ingress within the spatium of representation and semiotic difference, negates their “preconceptual, prelinguistic, prelapsarian” character and renders them “meaning *for* the poetic subject.”²² Baudelaire’s bid to contain melancholy while avoiding his baroque predecessors’ final leap into the realm of objectless faith, and his effort to remain within the realm of things, entail the enmeshment of correspondences with temporality (hence their anamnestic character) and the rejection of transcendental timelessness. Pensky’s brilliant synopsis of (Benjamin’s reading of) this paradoxical operation merits extensive quoting:

Like his Renaissance predecessors, Baudelaire will attempt to master the force of melancholy and remain in the realm of things. But as he does so, the attempt to “grasp” the moments of transcendent meaning from within the continuum of natural history leads to the impossible task of an expression of the timeless beauty of the correspondences from within the fallen language of allegory. For Baudelaire’s poetic work, bringing the correspondences into the realm of allegory and allegorical time consciousness means that moments of temporal transcendence are to be poetically constructed as a part

²¹ For an inexhaustible revelation of the antinomies to which the correspondences programme falls prey and for an understanding of the difference between the baroque melancholic agenda and that of Baudelaire, see Pensky, “Melancholia and Modernity,” in *Melancholy Dialectics*, especially 179-181.

²² Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 180.

of the temporal continuum itself. Transcendent time within the temporal continuum crystallizes in the image of the souvenir. The souvenir is the product of messianic time consciousness that undergoes commodification: this is *Erlebnis*; time as strangely segmented, as a series of discrete moments that bear no organic continuity with one another, that do not flow. Correspondences become souvenirs as they are brought into the reified realm of modern allegory. They are saved, but saved as dead: "The souvenir is the complement of the *Erlebnis*. In it the increasing self-alienation of the person who inventories his past as dead possession is distilled. In the 19th century allegory moved out of the surrounding world, in order to settle in the inner world."²³

In the light of the above, the souvenir is the correspondence that has been submitted to the reifying power of the allegory. It must be emphasised again that what underlies all this rationale is the premise of the temporal character of correspondences. This temporal character must be understood in the context of the *Erfahrung/Erlebnis* tension discussed above apropos of the dynamics of Baudelairean memory. The antinomies of allegorical melancholia with its non-integrateable memories can be summarised in the form of an attempt to save inner experience in the realm of correspondences. This inner experience is, however, doomed from the very beginning to collapse to dead souvenir during the correspondences operation due to the impossibility of empathetic retrieval of contents or the saturation of the temporal itinerary. Benjamin formulates the paradox in the following way: "The relic derives from the corpse; the souvenir from deceased experience which calls itself euphemistically *Erlebnis*."²⁴ Pensky summarises all this in the following way:

This is the result of Baudelaire's melancholy allegory and the reason why Baudelaire could not grasp the relationship between allegory and correspondence. From the point of view of the melancholic, this relationship

²³ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 180-1. In the last period Pensky quotes from Benjamin, "Central Park," 49.

²⁴ Benjamin, "Central Park," 42; cited in Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 181.

could only be grasped by resolving or overcoming its dialectical tension; that is, by developing a vision of poetic expression whereby the correspondences could be given voice without sacrificing the things themselves to the intention of the subject [without turning the things themselves into reified souvenirs, that is]. But this is precisely what the allegorist can under no circumstances do. Transcending allegoresis, as in the baroque, betrays the objects [by leaping into objectless faith, into transcendentalist metaphysics]. Mastering allegoresis heroically, as in the Renaissance or Baudelaire, betrays the objects as well [because of reified/ing memory, by turning the objects into dead commodities, souvenirs] –and betrays the redemptive will at the heart of allegoresis.

Heroic melancholy in the age of the commodity redeems the object, but only as souvenir. The transformation of the experience of divine remembrance into the souvenir is a source of Baudelaire's allegorical rage. Rage is, at bottom, the response to loss. The correspondence –as *idéal*—is the resonance of blessedness that still lingers like a faint fragrance amongst the assembled souvenirs.²⁵

I fail to fathom how Pensky can justify his assertion that Baudelaire "could not grasp the relationship between allegory and correspondence." The continuous undermining of the *idéal* by shocking flash-back upsurges of unassimilable memories, and the cleavage between perceived and cognised events, put in abeyance the notion of an authentic event and experience that have hypothetically been parcelled into souvenir. It is not the "betrayal of the object" in and through allegory that is the real issue here, but the viable possibility of assuming a cognitive and moral stance that can bracket the spurious notion of self-presence within experience while retaining the possibility of a contingent self-understanding prerequisite to praxis. I believe that it is the betrayal of historical responsibility that constitutes the real anxiety behind the transcendental twist of allegory. The way I read it, the crucial and ambivalent passage that contains Benjamin's subtle critique in germinal form is the following:

This [the allegory of resurrection, the final redemptive sublation] solves the riddle of the most fragmented, the most defunct, the most dispersed.

²⁵

Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 181-2; internal brackets added.

Allegory, of course, thereby loses everything that was most peculiar to it: the secret, privileged knowledge, the arbitrary rule, in the realm of dead objects, the supposed infinity of a world without hope. All this vanishes with this *one* about-turn, in which the immersion of allegory has to clear away the final phantasmagoria of the objective and, left entirely to its own devices, re-discovers itself, not playfully in the earthly world of things, but seriously under the eyes of heaven. And this is the essence of melancholy immersion: that its ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories, and that these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are represented, just as, ultimately, the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection.²⁶

Melancholia is seen by Benjamin as the side-effect of the modern subjects' incapacity to sustain the intra-mundane "phantasmagoria of the objective." His tone is subtly critical here, but critical nevertheless. Baudelaire's poetry thematises the betrayal of history inherent in any redemptive and/or transcendental stance. His allegorical proclivities resist the lure of nostalgia that usually accompanies a prolonged desolation over the retreat of experience.²⁷ At the same time, he cannot give in to the fragmentation and quantification of experience without voicing the exasperation of the subject forced to survive the fracturing of his socio-symbolic order. "For someone who is past experiencing, there is no consolation. Yet it is this very inability to experience that lies at the heart of rage."²⁸ Benjamin is perhaps right to speak of rage in the case of Baudelaire. I do not believe, however, that this is rage over a lost plenitude of concept and experience, exclusively. It is rage that is deeply political as much as

²⁶ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 232-3.

²⁷ Poems such as "Un Voyage à Cythère" (OC I: 117-9) make a mockery of the nostalgia for past beauty or bliss. Cythera is exposed as an "Eldorado banal" from the beginning. The only memory that the narrator will hold dear is that of the hanging corpse ("Devant toi, ... au souvenir si cher [At the sight of you, ... whose memory I hold dear]"), and the only empathetic retrieval possible is that of perennial sorrows: "Ridicule pendu, tes douleurs sont les miennes! / Je sentis, ... // Le long fleuve de fiel des douleurs anciennes [Grotesque hanging corpse, your sorrows are my own! / I felt, ... // The long stream of gall of past sufferings]." Cf. Benjamin's: "Le Voyage' is a renunciation of travel" ("Central Park," 47).

²⁸ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 143.

a predicament *within* language, and if there is interminable mourning in this poetry, it is of a non-restitutive, non-deluded nature.²⁹ The illusion that Baudelaire's threnodial poetry exposes is that of the allegedly reversible, conjunctural, exclusively historical causes of the catastrophe to which the poetry is made to respond. This hypothetical catastrophe is supposed to be the negative print of over-arching non-negotiable and ultimately extra-historical norms that sanction straight historicism.

Conclusively, it is the *supersession* of remembrance to the subtending infrastructure of time, and its discreet complicity with the refutation of all hope for a redemptive encounter with the past, that constitutes the work's open secret. Benjamin's following words compress the unreliable character of the only kind of memory that may be said to be internally linked to the experience it is supposed to belabour:

[M]ost memories that we search for come to us as visual images. Even the free-floating forms of the *mémoire involontaire* are still in large part isolated, though enigmatically present, visual images.... [One] must place himself in a special stratum --the bottommost-- of this involuntary memory, one in which the materials of memory no longer appear singly, as images, but tell us about a whole, amorphously and formlessly, indefinitely and weightily, in the same way as the weight of his net tells a fisherman about his catch.³⁰

Forming a complete life out of fragmented, isolated mnemonic images spells out an injunction. One, indeed, *must* place oneself in a special condition to

²⁹ On non-deluded mourning, see Paul de Man, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 239-262, esp. 262: "If mourning is called a 'chambre d'éternel deuil où vibrent de vieux rôles' ('Obsession,' OC I: 75), then this pathos of terror states in fact the desired consciousness of eternity and of temporal harmony as voice and as song. True 'mourning' is less deluded. The most it can do is to allow for non-comprehension and enumerate non-anthropomorphic, non-elegiac, non-celebratory, non-lyrical, non-poetic, that is to say, prosaic, or, better, *historical* modes of language power."

³⁰ Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," 209-10.

do this, in a phantasmatic *reconstruction* (with the "re" *sous rature*) of life out of random anamnestic fragments. But it also lets the deeper significance of recollection rise to the surface as a desperate gesturing towards experience, and not its recapitulation: "For the important thing for the remembering author is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection. Or should one call it, rather, a Penelope work of forgetting? Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory?"³¹ Most significantly, popular wisdom has it that the visual images that "amorphously" and "indefinitely" point to a whole life flare up most intensely when the subject's life approaches its end, in the face of death, at the moment when life attains completion. Theoretically, right before dying the subject is inundated with flash-backs, images that hanker after a complete life. But it is the closure of the life vista that makes this conjuring up possible. "The true measure of life is memory," writes Benjamin.³² Still, it is the end that confers the illusion of coherence upon a life that is called up in the mode of sporadic, monadological images.

By virtue of the same reasoning, the façade of a lyrical understanding of, and desire for, the transcendental within the temporal dimension hides, as much as reveals, its own duplicitous nature. The text poses this duplicity and this

³¹ Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," 198. The "purposive remembering" which is supposed to "[unravel] the web and the ornaments of forgetting" actually shrinks the world, concentrates it in a suffocating vacuum of time that Benjamin calls "convoluted time" (206). "But this very concentration in which things that normally just fade and slumber consume themselves in a flash is called rejuvenation Proust's method is actualization, not reflection" (207). Baudelaire's poetry is sceptical of the possibility of reflexively or empathetically reconstituting one's life. The difference between actualisation and reflection is enormous. Actualisation points to a constitutive absence of essence at the heart of experience. This undercuts Benjamin's restrained melancholic optimism concerning the viability of calling up the past.

³² Walter Benjamin, "Notes from Svendborg, Summer 1934," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 1927-1934 (Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 788.

simulation of transcendence as an inevitable precondition of its articulation and thus reveals its blind awareness to the second degree.

Baudelaire's dual resistance: synopsis

We had the experience but missed the meaning
T. S. Eliot, "Four Quartets"

Max Pensky thinks of Baudelaire's production as a text that "bears within it an encoded critique of the ideology of progress" yet "crystallizes the challenge that allegory presents to criticism itself."³³ This challenge to criticism bears the form of melancholy in the sense that the latter, in conjunction with allegory, cannot but de-essentialise *all* "inner experience," render its retrieval abortive *de facto*, and reify *all* memories. "How can the critic harness the flood of memories without translating the memories into souvenirs?"³⁴ Avoiding the paradigm of melancholy subjectivity, which is what Pensky ultimately recommends, means avoiding the dissolution of the "redemptive-constructive" encounter with nuclei of reality (fragments of social reality or mnemonic experiences) into de-essentialised, reified, alterity. "Memory is both the medium of the correspondences and the source of the bitterness that kills them."³⁵ A politically viable critique for Pensky (and, to a certain degree, Benjamin) would seek to "confront the critical challenge of redemption through representation without killing what it wants to redeem."³⁶ In other words, representation must be

³³ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 182.

³⁴ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 183.

³⁵ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 183.

³⁶ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 183.

salvaged from the clutches of reifying melancholic allegory, and some form of inner experience must be preserved against the levelling of *Erfahrung* and the frozen, lifeless memories of *Erlebnis*. I am not certain whether Pensky takes Baudelaire to task for having eroded the foundations of representation and memory to such an extent as to make it impossible for a socially attuned criticism to be articulated in his poetry, or whether he voices concern over the impasse of critical thought in general to which the withering of experience necessarily leads. I am sceptical about the implied premises underlying this desire for the preservation of a stable ground for representation and political praxis in the context of Baudelaire's poetry because they presuppose the reality of individual choice³⁷ in a way that reproduces categories of subjectivity and agency that have been rendered inoperative by the modern reorganisation of social and poetic forces. Even if individual choice is seen to be a strategic and flexible response to conjunctural challenges, the nostalgia for a praxis grounded in collectively shared values and representations and normatively justifiable value-judgements threatens to reintroduce surreptitiously the essentialism and analogical representationalism that Baudelaire's poetry, among others', problematised. Again, this is an issue that partakes explicitly of the political dimension, yet it is taken up because it is on essentially political grounds that critiques such as those of Terdiman and Pensky are predicated with respect to Baudelaire and poetic modernity in general. I have tried throughout to explain that Baudelaire's poetry responds to a crisis

³⁷ Regarding the issue of choice and its effects on historical praxis, and with respect to choosing between the two interpretations "of structure, of sign, [and] of play," (the one being origin-oriented, the other trying to "pass beyond man and humanism)," see Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 293: "I do not believe that today there is any question of *choosing* – in the first place because we are in a region ... of historicity where the category of choice seems particularly trivial;

of/in subjectivity *and* a social crisis directly located in the modern juncture of economic, political and cultural forces. Julia Kristeva's formulation is a particularly apt echoing chamber of this notion of the dual crisis to which, I believe, Terdiman and, to a lesser degree Pensky's, critiques fail to do justice:

The always renewed returned [semiotic chora that transgresses upon the symbolic realm, the realm of signification and cognition] of 'materiality' in 'logic' ensures negativity a permanence that can never be erased by the theses of a subjective and blocking desire. Thus heterogeneity is not sublimated but is instead opened up with the symbolic that it puts in process/on trial. There it meets the historical process under way in society, brought to light by historical materialism.³⁸

Despite the acute political and rhetorical overtones of Pensky and Terdiman's critiques a residual optimism concerning the retrievability of communal experience through the experiential and mnemonic debris of modernity remains. I find this irreconcilable with the retrograde effect that traumatic perception and memory, along with the modern deterioration of experiential capacities, can have upon the horizontal circumscription of experience. The capacity for political praxis does not necessarily vanish when one admits that post-Enlightenment's collective coding of reality has been irreversibly eroded. Baudelaire's poetry centres on the gap between perception and cognition and the rift between event and representation. It also "works out" the transgression of phenomenalist cognition by the irruption of sensuous materiality in the form of

and in the second, because we must first try to conceive of a common ground, and the *différance* of this irreducible difference."

³⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 191; cited in "Avant-Garde Practice: an interview with Vassiliki Kolokotroni," in *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, ed. Ross Mitchell Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 212-3. See also Suzanne Guerlac, "Transgression in Theory: Genius and the Subject of *La Révolution du langage poétique*," 250: "Parallel to the operations of the Kantian aesthetic sublime, the transgressive field of text (as of the sublime) pulverises the phenomenological subject and, at the same time, *oblige a relation to the subject*. It

the reified body that allegorically stands in for the heterogeneity of the signifier to “its” concept. Baudelaire’s work solicits the re-negotiation of the imbrication of aesthetics and history along lines that will be admissive of the inherent instability of the socio-symbolic coding of experience. Acknowledging the rift between perception and cognition and the defensive, contingent, and ideological binding of the two zones, does not necessarily lead to political or conceptual incapacitation but forces us to renegotiate the terms within which we engage reality, art, and politics. The examined works have assumed the labour of translating poetically the resistance of modern experience to understanding or to the conceptual harmony of consciousness and natural and social reality while refusing to lament the loss of constative certainty that this condition entails. The texts can only articulate this labour in a lyrical modality yet subtly expose the latter as an unavoidable simulation and supplement that comes to compensate for the retreat of semanticity and experience. This latter constitutes both their adversarial habitat and enabling condition. The historicist angle proves to be inadequate when it comes to accounting for the impact (upon its own foundations) of the hollowing out of reference and experience that it is forced, nevertheless, to negatively admit. I have throughout focused on the inherent contradictions of historicist perspectives. Their limitations are germane to this project since they compact the normative denominator underwriting much that is written with the aim to relate politics and literature vis-à-vis Baudelaire and poetic modernity. The vantage point from which this abortive conjunction takes off is ultimately transcendentalist. The relation is abortive not because there is absolutely no inter-

seems to be precisely this dissonance which constitutes the revolutionary –and the theoretical– subject in the theory of Kristeva” (emphasis added).

communication between literature and politics (or history) but because the terms investing the stakes involved are internally flawed. I have tried to show the performative character of the examined poetry and its resistance to the cognitive levelling of difference to which a certain literary criticism has assigned it. I read Baudelaire's poetry as addressing, and then refusing to subscribe to, a metaphysics of experience and representation in response to which he finally unleashes the rage of one who sees behind destitution, injustice, and suffering *both* a historically-contingent reification *and* the impossibility of historical grounding. As for representation, Baudelaire voices a critique of phenomenism, and a discontented affirmation of the gap between event and representation, or, in Jacques Derrida's terms, force and signification.³⁹

Pensky captures the ambivalence in Baudelaire's rhetorical gestures and writes of his poetry's melancholia in terms of "a discourse about the necessity and impossibility of the discovery and possession of 'objective' meaning by the subjective investigator."⁴⁰ In the dialectic of symbolicity and asymbolia that is played out in every melancholic act what is at stake is an awareness that exceeds the boundaries of historical understanding. This awareness reaches down to the psycho-semiotic foundations and enabling conditions of historical understanding - by, for example, facilitating awareness of the modicum of reification integral to every act of representation, and of its concomitant withering of essence. I disagree, therefore, with Pensky when he collapses allegorical melancholy in Baudelaire and, by implication, in Benjamin, to "political quietism."⁴¹ I read both

³⁹ See Derrida, "Force and Signification," in *Writing and Difference*, 3-30.

⁴⁰ Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 22.

⁴¹ See "Introduction," in *Melancholy Dialectics*, 4.

writers as being entangled in a disturbing awareness of the modern aporiae and performative contradictions as much as enacting them in their own poetic and theoretical texts respectively. The enactment of these antinomies does not detract from the rigour of their mindfulness, however. One particular instance of these contradictions is when a suprahistorical perspective is assumed in the name of historicism, as, for example, when Benjamin affirms the modern collapse of experience and the impossibility of integrating experiential contents within collectively sanctioned imaginaries and then proceeds to assign Baudelaire's poetry to a chronologically segmented point in literary and political history (a lyric poet "in the era of high capitalism"). Another example is Baudelaire's engagement with the realities that envelop him through the deployment of both historical and linguistic-psychological categories, not to mention his recourse to allegory, a rhetorical trope that both conveys and problematises historical understanding. One more instance of how historicity and extra-historical perspectives are conjugated is Benjamin's drawing on Freudian theory without accounting for the possibility that psychoanalysis affirms psychic infrastructures to a large extent unaffected by historical conjuncture, and as such the experience it probes into, and itself constitutes, is not easily amenable to historicisation. I take it that this is the charge of implication behind Benjamin's claim that Baudelaire's poetry addresses "a time [that] is outside history."⁴²

Conclusively, I have treated Baudelaire's poetry as the poetic space where the cleavage between historical event and its representation is addressed and covered rhetorically, whereas this distance is seen to be enabling of history and

⁴² Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 143. Also, "significant days are days of completing time ... They are not connected with the other days, but *stand out from time* (139; emphasis added).

not an obstacle to historical unfolding. I believe that Baudelaire's poetry mandates the renegotiation of the terms with which we perceive historical continuity and plenitude by also rendering apparent the existence of parallel histories whose voice has been stifled by official historiography. These are the histories of those deprived of historical presence, agency and representation, or rather of those whose presence has not been sanctioned by the agents of modern hegemony. I read Baudelaire's poetry as the textual space where aesthetics confronts politics as a result of an unsettling awareness ^{of} into the political nature of representation and the aesthetic nature of politics. His poetry brackets historicist hermeneutics by engaging a non-recuperable loss of experience, and therefore demands a conception of history that accommodates experiential indeterminacy, perspectival flexibility, and semantic unresolve.

In the light of Walter Benjamin's analyses it has become evident that Baudelaire wrote lyrical poetry within adversarial conditions which he ultimately managed to turn into enabling ones. This transformation could only have been effected through an acute sense of the ruination of experience under modern economic and perceptual conditions. This latter endangered the very possibility of writing (lyrical) poetry and necessitated the redefinition of it in terms of a social imperative. This injunction, however, never took the form of political engagement not because Baudelaire was politically incapacitated but because of his awareness of the dual valence of the crisis he responded to. He resorted to neither an affirmation of a putative historical infrastructure monitoring him as an agent nor to the typical ahistoricism of an aesthetic cancellation of the collective dimension of experience. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé welcomed the

finitude and non-sensical materiality that inhere in all physical and semiotic acts and refused to regard poetic discourse as a compensatory force making up for what is commonly considered as the catastrophe of death and the suffering caused by the temporal power.⁴³ Baudelaire had already codified the non-conjunctural sapping of the foundations of essence upon which homologies of consciousness and reality accrue and assume historically recognisable modalities. While labouring within the Romantic conceptual sphere he undermined the ontology of genius, which renders him uniquely relevant to a still contemporary re-orientation concerning the meaning of Romanticism and modern subjectivity. Baudelaire's work cancels the tonalities of a genial and pathic subjectivity. It labours under the sign of the disappearance of the reassuring creative voice, codifies its eclipse while deploying a lyrical language, and thus effects a generic and semantic upheaval whose repercussions are still unassimilable today.

Baudelaire was also sensitive to the modern mutations of perceptual and cognitional processes that the advent of modern technology imposed. His ambivalent stance towards photography⁴⁴ reflects the modern uneasiness over the technical reproducibility of reality that, for the first time in history, canonises the itemisation of experience by presenting reality as a series of frozen instants.⁴⁵ Baudelaire's ambivalence educes the realisation that the modern reproduction of reality does not enhance the assimilation of experience but, on the contrary, puts it

⁴³ Parenthetically, and with regard to the French Symbolists, their alleged aesthetic recompense for finitude is more the projection of a certain literary criticism than a reality verifiable from the texts themselves. Neither Mallarmé nor Valéry embrace univocally the erasure of history and the bracketing of consciousness in the name of a synaesthetic mélange or a linguistic idealism that would purportedly compensate for a hypothetical loss of reality.

⁴⁴ See OC II: 618-9.

⁴⁵ Memory is "photographic" and "pictorial" anyway. But in every perceptual act there is an element of temporal distance between the perceiving consciousness and the perceived object, even if the act is supposed to be consummated in the mode of simultaneity.

into jeopardy by presenting modern man with a (photographic) “perception” of reality that is foreign to the communal understanding of it. For the first time in history human perception is seen to be just one organisational mode of reality among others, which results in an enhanced sense of alienation befalling the modern subject vis-à-vis natural and social reality. It is not accidental that photographic reproductions of natural landscapes freeze the natural *tableaux* into *nature morte* and thus destroy any sense of naturality supposedly inherent in them. The whole context within which Baudelaire writes puts the notions of immanent essence, naturality, and subjectivity in abeyance. Baudelaire, however, does not respond with an anachronistic affirmation of tradition, nor does he shatter the formal and lyrical coherence in his verses in an attempt to emulate the fragmentation of reality that he experiences as a social subject and thus simulate mastery at the level of form over what has been irretrievably lost at the level of reality –which could be said of Pound to a certain extent. He answers the withering of experience in accordance with the ambivalent logic that tries to cope with trauma by either integrating it within a meaning-giving narrative or by somatically acting it out. I consider this ambivalent poetic strategy preferable to the facile erasure of the conceptual horizon within which the very opposition of event and representation, “force” and “signification” (in Derrida’s language) can be formulated. Baudelaire’s ambivalence is not due to his inability to choose one analytical mode over another but constitutes an inherent trait of a modernity that struggles to situate itself in the space opened up by the difference between the above terms. His poetic belabouring of the political, historical, and moral constitution of the modern subject, and his refusal to reproduce patterns of

thought that had been invalidated by the modern political and technical apparatuses, reflect a sense of historical responsibility and aesthetic acuity which are not to be found in the assertive normativity of more or less sophisticated determinisms. His double resistance was addressed, first, towards ascribing the modern vanishing of integrateable experience to exclusively historical determinants. Second, he refused to respond to the collapse of experiential immanence by affirming an extra-historical essentiality underwriting reality that could allegedly be captured empathetically (through aesthetic memory, synaesthesia, correspondences, etc.). This resistance signals the advent of a poetic thought that overtly addresses the loss of presence and historical plenitude in non-idealist terms. His dual refusal never succumbs to ahistoricism since the presence of historical frameworks always subsumes his individual narrators' lives, not to mention the fact that a problematic on the historicity of events is integrally embedded in the thematic axes. These historical environments, however, are not equivalent to larger explanatory frameworks that can guarantee historical understanding and stabilise the historical referents. In Baudelaire's poetry *history is the memory of the others* (both in the sense of the subjective and objective genitive). In "Le Cygne," for example, history is the deprivations and sufferings that Andromaque remembers (or rather, is fantasised as remembering), however, it is also the poetic narrator's virtual "remembrance" of Andromaque the pseudo-historical figure that contributes to the sense of the historical present.

Baudelaire's narrators can have a sense of the present only through the mediation of memories, "real" or "fabricated." Memory, therefore, is constitutive of the present not only in the sense of dialectically interweaving past and present

contents, but also in the sense of warding off the plethora of reality stimuli threatening to overwhelm human consciousness. In summary terms, for (present) experience to be registered as such, it must have been mediated by memory, it must have turned into memory. Experience screening is always belated. In Benjamin's words, "none of us has time to live the true dramas of the life that we are destined for. This is what ages us --this and nothing else. The wrinkles and creases on our faces are the registration of the great passions, vices, insights that called on us; but we, the masters, were not at home."⁴⁶ It is in this sense that Baudelaire's poetry precludes the putative reality of self-presence and the coincidence of history and self-history via memory and testimony, and renders its underlying premise of the possibility of (self) witnessing aberrant. His engagement with history is not affirmative but critical of the foundations of historical witnessing. As such, it addresses the violence lurking behind every act of displacement, be it tropological or "historical," responds to it in the guise of lyricism, exposes its own disguises, and finally shatters the illusion of an elegiac affirmation of human consciousness in and through language.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," 207.

⁴⁷ See Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," 200: "[The elegiac form of happiness is] the eternal repetition, the eternal restoration of the original, the first happiness. It is this elegiac idea of happiness --it could also be called Eleatic-- which for Proust transforms existence into a preserve of memory." *Pace* Benjamin, but also definitely *within* the noosphere Benjamin enabled, I have tried to emphasise that the destructive dimension of memory overwhelms the redemptive. In his own deeply melancholic words: "[O]nly a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past --which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments" ("Theses on the Philosophy of History," 246).

CHAPTER NINE

SUBJECTIVITY, HISTORY AND ALLEGORY IN T. S. ELIOT'S WORK

[E]very idiosyncrasy is a particular act of violence
T. S. Eliot, "Milton II"

Tradition and the subject: between the essays and the poetry

This chapter negotiates the particular inflections that the dissolution of essence-bound experience and subjectivity assumes in the work of T. S. Eliot. Within the echoing chamber of the previous discussion of Baudelaire, it will be argued that Eliot's oeuvre belabours the contours of a subjectivity that voices the predicament of its disintegration in the mode of homeopathic fragmentation ("The Waste Land") and hallucinatory soliloquy ("Prufrock"). This voicing amounts to disintegration to the second degree. Any notion of over-arching history discernible in the texts will be argued to be susceptible of a radical unseating of positive contents. Eliot's narratival subjects operate in the interstices between historically assignable existence and a psychotic elision of reality-anchored cognition. As such, they inhabit the discursive terrain wherein the linguistic foundations of subjectivity can be put into relief. However, the aim is to discuss subjectivity in Eliot within the qualifying environment delimited by the contrast between Baudelaire's melancholic allegories and Eliot's fragmented histories. Eliot framed depersonalisation and finitude within a transcendentalist configuration of history and a nominalist/analogical theory of language. His essays reverberate with moral, political and cultural injunctions to embed experience within vaulting frameworks that will assign it a historically recognisable place. The poetry, however, tells another story. It unfolds in tense counterpoint to the criticism, and occasionally as if in defiance of it. In his poetic

works Eliot embodies the imperative that the writer and the person be kept apart. The poetry does not suffer from overexposure to intentions, which is the primary drawback of the essays. They seem to be uninformed by his principle that "the poet [the author, by extension] has not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium."¹ The problem is, however, that the way the essays negotiate it, the "medium" turns out to be even more stifling culturally than traditional accounts of personality. The author has^{been}/transformed into a surface upon which history, culture, language (all defined in essentialist terms) inscribe themselves in indelible ink. The more he emanates and disseminates his cultural determinants, the more of an author he is. The emotion of art may be impersonal, but it is so so that language can be entirely subdued to its historical determinations. The good poet, according to Eliot, must "force, ... dislocate if necessary, language into his ["his" era's, the era of which he is a reflector] meaning."² Baudelaire, however, compels the unsettling realisation that it is the opposite that actually does take place: meaning is forced into language so that discourse can consolidate in the guise of a communicational act.

The ontological gap precluding the commensurability of experience and its verbal expression is, nevertheless, negatively engaged in the examined works. The first-phase poetry³ mobilised irony and a devastating sarcasm as vehicles of the disjunction of experience and meaning, a theme that will underwrite Eliot's poetry up to the *Four Quartets*. In *The Waste Land* one encounters the

¹ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Prose*, 42.

² Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *Selected Prose*, 65.

³ By "first-phase poetry" I refer to the sarcastic, irony-suffused, poems from the *Prufrock* sequence through *Poems --1920*, to *The Waste Land*. I consider *The Hollow Men* to be transitory and premonitory of the transcendentalist twist that *Ash-Wednesday* embodies, and which will climax in the *Four Quartets*.

compulsive elaboration of themes of sterility, sexual frustration, fragmentation of experiential cores, loss of reality and meaning. This elaboration occurs in a non-restorative mode despite a diffusive tone of cool lament that seems occasionally to permeate the text and affirm the healing force of nostalgia. It is a basic tenet of this thesis that what appears at first sight to be an interminable mourning over the collapse of integral experience and the impossibility of its retrieval hides a liberating admission of randomness, finitude and the power of language and death to install difference. No normative recuperation at the level of concept and experience is ultimately attained. The aleatory elements of this poetry do not coalesce into a dialectical ensemble of mutually recognisable matrices that encase their determining historical and moral imperatives. This resistance has been textually integrated in various modes one of which is the obsessive affirmation of death and the temporal gnawing at the foundations of essence. Another one is the admission of incomprehensibility at the core of the conceptual moment ("Prufrock"). The disjunction of performance and constation is integral to the poetry beyond the realm of intentions. Its narrativel subjects function in the interim between the two zones.

Eliot's poetic project is of an entirely different nature from his critical portfolio. This difference is enabled by the generic antithesis between a discourse that is content to serve intentions and programmes, and a language that has already bypassed the terrain of intentionality by the time it is articulated as poetry. However, close reading of the essays reveals a plethora of inner contradictions and inconsistencies that recount the self-justificatory and reductive dovetailing of poetic discourse to a flat plane of historical, moral and political imperatives that

the essays programmatically undertook. Pursuing such a reading is peripheral to my concern which is to elucidate the collapse of experience and testimonial accountability that the poetry testifies to within the qualifying framework of Baudelairean subjectivity, yet necessary. I will refer sporadically to the essays in counterpoint to the poetry with the aim to enhance this typically Anglo-American twist of subjectivity along more conformist lines. Eliot took up the task of discrediting the subjective dimensions of poetic discourse (which he reductively identified with his oversimplified version of Romanticism) in order to consolidate the hegemony of history, culture and morality over the writing and the praxial subject. However, his prose and poetry collide in a most telling manner that brings into sharp relief the mutual closure of poetic discursivity and entelechic determinisms. In the Dante essay he writes that "in a way, these cantos are of the greatest *personal* intensity... In the *Paradiso* Dante himself ... becomes de- or super-personalised."⁴ There is a massive difference between de-personalisation and super-personalisation, however. Their conflation undermines his applied poetics of impersonality. There are numerous instances where the postural character of his avowed depersonalisation is revealed: "What may be considered corrupt or decadent in the morals of Massinger is not the alteration or diminution in morals; it is simply the disappearance of all the personal and real emotions which this morality supported and into which it introduced a kind of order. As soon as the emotions disappear the morality which ordered it appears hideous."⁵ Eliot needs the personal dimension to support his teleological edifice. Pure impersonality would fissure it from the inside. Baudelaire, on the other hand,

⁴ Eliot, "Dante," in *Selected Prose*, 226.

⁵ Eliot, "Philip Massinger," in *Selected Prose*, 159.

exposed the imbrication of personal emotions and the grid of moral imperatives by showcasing the political grounding of morality. He bracketed morality not because personal emotions had (inexplicably) disappeared, but because it served the interests of the ruling classes and functioned as an instrument of interiorisation of the hegemonic ideology. Eliot's oscillations are not accidental, or simply infelicitous, but endemic. I will show, however, how his poetry contains niches of resistance to the organicist logic that many commentators have traced in it, within the conceptual terrain of counter-memory and the vanishing of the experiencability of reality that was set up in the previous chapters on Charles Baudelaire.

***The Hollow Men: being deprived of the pardon of speech*⁶**

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow⁷

The craving for the elimination of what the Eliotic protagonist calls "the Shadow," i.e., the mediating agency of language, the materiality of the letter, has throughout his work assumed different forms and various names. In abstracting

⁶ See Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," in *Écrits: A Selection*, 70: "... these are the hermetic elements that our exegesis resolves, the equivocations that our invocation dissolves, in a deliverance of the imprisoned meaning, from the revelation of the palimpsest to the given word of the mystery and to the pardon of speech."

⁷ T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 92.

from them all a common denominator, one is inevitably led to the notion of organicism. The genuine existential pathos of "Between the idea / And the reality /... Falls the Shadow," echoes the subject's resistance towards the heteronomy signalled by language, resistance towards the inaugurating praxis of language as non-ontological mediation. The monologising narrator gradually voices his inevitable entanglement in the nexus of mediation, which has expanded to such a degree as to engulf the sexual realm.

The poem negatively educes the hypothesis that essence and one's relation to it can no longer be experienced on the platform of the Hegelian progressive self-realisation of a consciousness that preserves within it the successive moments of its history. The space that opens in between, as much as intermingles, the matrices of this binomial economy is not saturated by an integratist impetus. It shapes up as effect of the singularity and abruptness of an insurmountable ontological cleavage. The staccato rhythm of the text aims at reproducing the overarching effect of discontinuity with the insistence of a repetition-compulsion that, however, fails to master what it dreads non-residually. What is in excess of this attempt at mastery reactivates the whole process, which can be regarded as being interminable. The agon of the *hollow man* is fought over conceptual plenitude and historical integration, which demand, however, shapes up in an intransitive mode. Social pragmatics is nowhere visible here. This intransitivity, which relates to language rather than existential awkwardness, reduces the subject's range of responses to a series of convulsive attempts at recapturing the immediacy of an imaginary self-coincidence *within experience*. The textual narrator fails to accede to the order of either his personal life or the broader

experiential frames engulfing him and wallows in a mixture of self-pity and incantational compulsion. Simultaneously, in the interim of the stanzas, another melancholic realisation punctures the textual whole, and in a most characteristic fashion as its narrator is impossible to identify. The phrase does not fall within the pragmatics of interlocution: "Life is very long." Experiencing life as an incessant repetition of the same, a continuous attempt at distilling essence from experience, forces the textual subject to the reality of sterility, and, most important, tedious immobility.⁸ The subject is blind to the fact that temporality is arrested not because between the "motion" and the "act" falls the mediating "Shadow," but because self-coincidence causes the suspension of the temporal axis. It brackets temporal protention and retention upon which a dynamic sense of self and other must necessarily depend. The call for essence infantilises temporality into homogeneous unfolding of the self-identical. In the terrain of sexuality, self-grounding, by implication, shades off into impotence, the latter being a sexual index of the inability to relate to the other in a transitive mode. The potency whose lack is connected with mediation, and lamented as such, is essentially coextensive with auto-affective desire. Later on I will address auto-affection through the lenses of Jacques Derrida's *La Voix et le phénomène*,⁹ in an attempt to stress the self-contradictory and self-negating character of this self-enclosure. The alleged recognition of self by self cannot clog up the unwinding of a certain temporality -no matter how interiorised, and organically conceived- and finally yields to the dislocation of self-enclosure. It is made to submit to the

⁸ Baudelairean *ennui* can also be seen as an effect of arrested temporality, generated within conditions of a temporal and praxial vacuity.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *La Voix et le phénomène: introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967).

tremors of linguistic and temporal exteriority. This is the trajectory that "Prufrock" negotiates.

"The Hollow Men" articulates the relation of the subject to his speech and by extension to the enveloping explanatory frameworks that legitimise his language and intentions. The alienation emitted by the semi-autistic intentionality of the enunciating protagonist translates a symptomatic denial of speech, expressed through language, of course, and so never inhabiting the silence it professes to desire ["In this last of meeting places / We grope together / And avoid speech"]. There is a "language-barrier opposed to speech, and the precautions against verbalism that are a theme of the discourse of the 'normal' man in our culture merely serve to reinforce its thickness."¹⁰ The self-inflicted denial behind the whole enterprise can be seen to combine with a mute nostalgia for the prevalence of ocular plenitude. "Speech varies, but our eyes are all the same," writes Eliot.¹¹ Yet, the poem already exposes the contingency of sight upon broader conceptual infrastructures which *The Waste Land* will radicalise to the point of revealing the blindness endemic in any conceptual elaboration of reality. The primacy assigned to perception reflects a cognitive economy that tries to bypass language in order to access the referent directly without sensuous mediatory interventions. However, the divine sight that would reconstitute transcendental sense has abandoned the textual narrator.

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley

¹⁰ Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," 71.

¹¹ Eliot, "Dante," 210.

This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.¹²

The *empty men* "groping together avoiding speech," voice "l'aliénation de la folie [the alienation of madness]," and their affliction consists in their persistently resisting the fact that, in Jacques Lacan's words, "le sujet y est parlé plutôt qu'il ne parle [the subject ... is spoken rather than speaking]."¹³ In attempting to negate mediation the textual subject has incurred upon himself the hollowing out of his own intentionality. It is language that engenders intentionality, and not vice-versa. Nevertheless, the text does not allow any restitution of the materiality/transcendence divide in the form of a reversal of the relevant poles. Neither the rationalism of transcendent concept nor the empirical intransigence of reality givens is highlighted here or in the other examined works. The narrator's discourse does not enforce the right of appearances over the essence of abstract concept. It is addressed to simulacral experience. This latter, however, should not be understood as the negative indicator of essence-replete life

¹² Eliot, *Collected Poems*, 91.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," 69.

subsisting outside history.¹⁴

The pursuit of what lies anterior to the serial articulations of discourse, of what is allegedly primordial to the genesis of language, ultimately leads the narrator to death ["In this last of meeting places"].¹⁵ After the loss of ocular plenitude and speech, the subject is ensnared in a realm which inevitably is that of the structure of language winnowed out of originary finitude. The fact that the subject cannot pattern his relation to language after factual experience impinges upon his understanding of finitude. Speech is not offered to him as pardon but as hideous imperative.

The demand for reality: to eliminate the signifier

The poet [must] force, ... dislocate if necessary,
language into his meaning.

T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets"

Tropological configurations in language, and the logic that governs them, are intrinsic to the broader discussion on the impossibility of ontologising experience and history. Language's mediatory and materialist intervention is inextricably linked with its tropological character which in the case of modernist poetry has been enhanced to the point of internally threatening meaning as

¹⁴ The impossibility of genetic substantialisation is what I attempt to formulate throughout. See Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 167-8. Foucault writes apropos of Deleuze's reading of Plato, and in the overall context of the aporia of essence and the event, that a reversal of Plato in the sense of restituting appearances over essential forms is insufficient, and can only strengthen the metaphysical bipolar infrastructure. "And what will enter, submerging appearance and breaking its engagement to essence, will be the event; the incorporeal will dissipate the density of matter; a timeless insistence will destroy the circle that imitates eternity; an impenetrable singularity will divest itself of its contamination by purity; the actual semblance of the simulacrum will support the falseness of false appearances."

¹⁵ See Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," 105: "it is as a desire for death that he [the subject] affirms himself for others; if he identifies himself with the other, it is by fixing him solidly in the metamorphosis of his essential image, and no being is ever evoked by him except among the shadows of death. To say that this mortal meaning reveals in speech a centre exterior to language is more than a metaphor; it manifests a structure."

traditionally understood, i.e., as being subsidiary to the solid grasp of reality's essence invariants. The apparently self-contradictory nature of the rhetorical organisation of Baudelaire's poetry, i.e., the lyrical voicing of the impossibility of sustaining a symbolic/lyrical understanding of the world under modern conditions of existence, is collateral to this threat. The evacuation of essence can legitimately be seen as the hidden agenda behind the decadent thematic decoys in Baudelaire's poetry.

In the case of Eliot what is sometimes felt to be an extreme stylistic self-awareness that erupts upon the text's linear diegesis can be ascribed to the negative realisation of language's proper and inalienable qualities.

That was a way of putting it -not very satisfactory,
A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter.¹⁶

What seems to constitute the target of intentional negation, i.e., poetic discursivity, is immediately reaffirmed in and through the very act that stated its negation. The pathos of the wrestle with words and meaning is triggered by the impossibility of pertaining to the order of pure non-paraphrasis/non-circumlocution; circumlocution being the effect of the exogeneity of signifier to signified. Paradoxically, what the textual narrator professes not to understand is that this order would entail locutionary arrestation, pure semantic stasis, and the implosion of the equation signifier-signified-referent. This is not a failure of understanding that should be attributed to the subject's individual weakness,

¹⁶ T.S.Eliot, "Four Quartets," in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 198.

however. It is secondary to the desire for the transparency of the linguistic sign to the reality constant turned referent, as if the process whereby the latter relates to the former is free of semiotic/material residues. I contend that any affirmation of this transparency in the poetry serves the purpose of mere wish-fulfilment. What is articulated in texts such as the above is a recurrent need that obeys an entropic logic. The more the sufficiency of reality constants wanes through their absorption into language, the more the Eliotic subject voices concern over this obfuscation and desires the restitution of a putative diaphaneity of sign to reality-given. The principle of non-circumlocutionary discourse that the extract expresses and purports to exemplify cannot but be appropriated to an analogical semantics, and it is symptomatic that it is uttered in such a self-defeatist way.

The self-undermining mode whereby the subject gives vent to his exasperation over the material thickness of discourse translates an albeit negative and stifled insight into the void of essence underlying the purported owning of reality's positive contents and the language supposed to render them communicable. The intentionality by which it is informed is proleptic and, therefore, self-justificatory. The pseudo-modesty that accompanies it would be really annoying to a sensitive reader if it were not immediately cancelled by the pragmatic mode of its being expressed. Eliot's struggle at this point is, at least, intra-linguistic by admission, intra-tropological. In other occasions, though, his efforts seem to concern the appropriation of the existent *in itself*, as if language were a diaphanous veil to be torn apart so that the object could be brought forth in all its substance and concreteness. In the context of his rejection of Milton and

Swinburne's idioms on the grounds of excessive verballity, his demand for a solid grasp of immutable sense acquires disturbing inflections:

This speaks to me of what I have long aimed, in writing poetry; to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or poetry so *transparent* that we should not see the poetry, but that which we are meant to see *through* the poetry, poetry so *transparent* that in reading it we are intent on what the poetry *points at, and not on the poetry*, this seems to me the thing to try for.¹⁷

The calculated denigration of the aural dimension is a programmatic integer in the criticism. In "Milton I" he writes that "a dislocation takes place, through the hypertrophy of the auditory imagination at the expense of the visual and tactile, so that the inner meaning is separated from the surface, and tends to become something occult, or at least without effect upon the reader until fully understood."¹⁸ What *The Hollow Men* poetically lets be seen, that is, the inevitable collapse of ocular/conceptual plenitude to a phantasm of reference, the essays castigate as flawed strategy, reversible, contingent, and affixed to a historically recognisable place and time.¹⁹

Eliot also failed to understand that, in his systematic critical effort to devalue the figural dimension, what he invoked was a series of allegedly Romantic ideological tenets, banalised, however, to a considerable extent. The

¹⁷ Unpublished lecture on "English Letter Writers," New Haven, Connecticut [Winter 1933]; cited in F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 89-90; emphasis added.

¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, "Milton I," in *Selected Prose*, 263.

¹⁹ In "Milton II," however, Eliot will mitigate the edge of his critique: "I do not think that we should attempt to *see* very clearly any scene that Milton depicts: it should be accepted as a shifting phantasmagory This limitation of visual power ... turns out to be not merely a negligible defect, but a positive virtue.... We must ... not expect to see clearly; our sense of sight must be blurred, so that our *hearing* may become more acute" (*Selected Prose*, 270). The underlying emphasis is, nevertheless, on the antagonism between the aural and ocular elaborations of reality. The primacy of the latter over the former remained an unwavering given throughout Eliot's work.

scenario of the catastrophic "dissociation of sensibility"²⁰ that set in at some stage in "the seventeenth century" can only make sense in counterpoint to an organicist and immanentist conception of meaning-production and the artistic endeavour in general.²¹ Christopher Norris has emphasised the contaminating logic of analogism that capitalises on the convergence between history, meaning, and phenomenal perception.²² Eliot's aesthetic ideology is reflexive of, as much as it lends critical weight to, the homologisation of the sphere of language and meaning with experience -either empirical, or purportedly reconstituted through obedience to the cultural hegemony. What is premised is the binding of language to the realm of phenomenal cognition, a basic tenet of all theocentric, aestheticist,

²⁰ See Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," 64. Organic sensibility entails "a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling" (63).

²¹ See Christopher Norris, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1988), 35-6, 117. Norris rightly insists on Eliot's numerous programmatic inconsistencies. They must become the object of analysis because they are symptomatic of a New Criticist mixture of assertorial rhetoric and a certain application of critique-politics, which is, or purports to be, blind to indebtedness to previous critical paradigms. An apotheosis of tradition, at the same time, reverberates throughout. Norris:

Thus when Eliot (and the New Critics after him) set out to rewrite the canonical Tradition of English poetry, they did so by means of an historical myth which expressly devalued the Romantics but implicitly invoked a whole series of arch-Romantic values and assumptions. If there did indeed occur, as Eliot thought, a "dissociation of sensibility," a cultural malaise that set in some time toward the mid-seventeenth century, then the only possible standard by which this decline could be measured is that of the "organic" or unified sensibility, a condition of reconciled thought and sensibility conceived very much in Hegelian terms.... What emerges from Eliot's account is precisely the linkage that de Man perceives between a certain, highly simplified notion of poetic language and an attitude that reduces all history to a species of reactionary myth For de Man, on the contrary, such thinking leads to a kind of aesthetic imperialism, an authoritarian drive whose signs may be read in the subsequent uses of organicist myths and metaphors. Thus in Eliot, for instance, the idea of "tradition" goes along with that of an imaginary, long-lost cultural order when thought and sensibility were as yet untouched by the dislocating forces of secular history and politics. (117-8)

What is apparent throughout is a "mystified vision of cultural order" and a series of "self-serving idealizations". The way they are disarticulated by the poetic texts constitutes a vital and open agenda. The essays themselves, however, are not impervious to a reading that would reveal their potential for a self-undermining on the level of positive contents.

²² "[Tennyson and Browning] do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility" (Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," 64).

and organicist hermeneutics. Norris' statement concerning Hans Robert Jauss' *Rezeptionsästhetik* applies equally well to Eliot: "If understanding transcends the obstacles of temporal and cultural distance, it does so by perceiving those salient features of the work that stand out against the various implicit 'horizons' of past and present response."²³ This transcendence can only transpire by means of abstraction from the materiality of concrete life interests. As such it is profoundly ideological.

What is discernible behind Eliot's (and, incidentally, Pound's) insistence on the primacy of phenomenalist cognition, and their -admittedly ambivalent-emphasis on the conceptual grasping of invariants of reality, is the commensurability of the linguistic realm with reality givens. Pound's sensuous intuitionism yielded, however, to the gradual interiorisation of the historical dimension to the extreme point of turning the latter into an internal periplus. His agenda vis-à-vis the historico-political dimension dramatically condenses, and polarises, the tensional congruence of phenomenism and language agency in a series of poetic texts which obsessively thematise the phantasmatic constitution of their meaning. The *ego scriptor* finally comes to allegorise himself into a grammatical moment embedded within a series of historical kernels whose semantics fail to mutually accrue.²⁴ To a certain extent, the same applies to the narrational subjects of "Prufrock," "Gerontion," and the "Preludes," where insistence on dialectical self-correction in terms of an increased sensitisation and upgrading of consciousness, does not harmonise with the desired heightening of phenomenal cognition. The potency of the texts lies in their offering the

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Norris, *Paul de Man*, 37.

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See Ezra Pound, *The Pisan Cantos* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954).

possibility of reading the immanence of this centrifugal co-existence of antagonistic moments within them as something more than negatively intended.

**Eliot's static allegories versus Baudelaire's dissolution of mythology
into the space of history²⁵**

History is not simply a science but also and not least a
form of remembrance <Eingedenken>. What science
has "determined" remembrance can modify.

Benjamin, "Konvolut N"

The disarticulation of phenomenalist cognition that "The Hollow Men" educes shapes up in distinction to Eliot's statements on allegory and the predominance he ascribed to the specular dimension within the grids of perception. His understanding of allegory differs radically from Baudelaire and Benjamin's construals of this tropological ensemble and is premised on religious transcendentalism being immanent to it. What Baudelaire/Benjamin treated as a transcendental distortion and betrayal of allegory's force, i.e., its no longer zeroing in on the detritus of history and experience in order to leap into the realm of faith and afterworld mythologies, Eliot considers as a *sine qua non*. He stresses the cultural and religious conditioning of the allegorical mind and its lucidity of style,²⁶ as much as its creation within a European Catholic Middle-Ages milieu. All this inevitably detracts from allegory's radical relativising of its own meaning

²⁵ See Benjamin, "Konvolut N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," 458.

²⁶ "What we should consider is not so much the meaning of the images [which is there, nevertheless, primordial, unaffected, and exogenous to the allegorical grid], but the reverse process, that which led a man having an idea to express it in images. We have to consider the type of mind which by nature and *practice* tended to express itself in allegory.... [I]t was not a device to enable the uninspired to write verses, but really a mental habit" ("Dante," 209). In general, Eliot taxonomises in accordance with inflexible moral, cultural and political criteria. His insistence on "types of mind" is one more disturbing pointer to the fact. In contrast to Eliot's immutable and essentialist allegorical imagery, Benjamin's configuration of the dialectical and/or allegorical image is motivated by a sense of permanent peril threatening to obliterate its historical character: "The image that is read --which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability-- bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded" (Benjamin, "Konvolut N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," 463).

through the transparently conjunctural character of the relation of its signs. He also insists on the preponderance of the visual dimension, which seems to be the only common denominator underneath differing configurations of allegory.²⁷ His distance from Benjamin's understanding of the optical parameter, however, is significant. The optical element in Eliot is bound to a visionary grasp of reality which he considers perfectly legitimate even for the modern world.²⁸ It is part of a medieval intuitive grasp of phenomena. Eliot turned allegory into myth denuding it thus of its critical potential.²⁹ In his version of things there is no space for any allegorical entanglement into history, and no cleavage between the poles of self-understanding that medieval allegory promotes. The subject is no stranger to himself because the elaboration of meaning, whether the allegorical meaning or the broader significance of what it means to be human, is not broached at all: "[A]llegory means *clear visual images*. And clear visual images are given more intensity by having a meaning --we do not need to know what that meaning is, but in our awareness of the image we must be aware that the meaning is there too."³⁰ No more clear formulation of the desire to force the allegorical elaboration of reality into the *mould* of univocal meaning could be given.³¹

²⁷ See Benjamin, "Central Park," 52: "In allegory the original interest is not linguistic but optic."

²⁸ "Dante's is a *visual* imagination.... It is visual in the sense that he lived in an age in which men still saw visions. It was a psychological habit, the trick of which we have forgotten, but as good as any of our own [W]e have forgotten that seeing visions --a practice now relegated to the aberrant and uneducated-- was once a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming" ("Dante," 209). If seeing visions was a *disciplined* practice, however, then the unpredictable, unsolicited, and haphazard nature of epiphany that it is supposed to serve vanishes.

²⁹ Baudelaire's project, on the contrary, addressed the possibility of "the dissolution of 'mythology' into the space of history" (Benjamin, "Konvolut N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," 458).

³⁰ Eliot, "Dante," 209.

³¹ "In *good allegory*, like Dante's, it is not necessary to understand the meaning first to enjoy the poetry, but that our enjoyment of the poetry makes us want to understand the meaning" ("Dante," 230; emphasis added).

The differences between Eliot and Benjamin's configuration of the image, the allegorical image for that matter, symptomatise a significant divergence of ideological outlook that inevitably bears on their respective aesthetic positions. To Benjamin, dialectical, historical images, the images that Baudelairean allegory built on, are genuine pointers to historical becoming. His idiosyncratic understanding of dialecticity does not detract from, but on the contrary reinforces, the irreducibly historical nature of these images. Contrary to Eliot's totally static understanding of allegory and its concurrent imagery networks, Benjamin enhances the destructive-redemptive impact of the monadological *and* dialectical image upon historical continua and stresses the fragile constellation that the present forms with the past. This latter has nothing to do with Eliot's stifling tradition which amounts to the stringing out in time and space of primal essence and history, both being unaffected by the vicissitudes of historical strife.³² Eliot goes for empathy on the basis of a co-sharing of every age in primal givens of essence that translate into cultural norms, moral imperatives, and political injunctions. This is what lies behind his affirmation of the "historical sense" which "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence [T]he whole of literature of Europe from Homer ... has a

³² Cf.: "It may be that the continuity of tradition is mere semblance. But then precisely the persistence of this semblance of persistence provides it with continuity" (Benjamin, "Konvolut N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," 486). In *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934) Eliot presents a corrective to a static construal of tradition by emphasising the need for the maintenance of orthodoxy that will guarantee the upgrading of tradition without at the same time relinquishing its normative and timeless core (29). Therein tradition is seen to be unconscious (29) and aided by conscious orthodoxy. In the "Tradition" essay, however, he had supported the view that "[tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour" (38). *After Strange Gods* was eventually withdrawn from publication, yet more because of some potentially damaging and strategically infelicitous anti-Semitic remarks (see page 20) rather than for inherently theoretical reasons. In general, the tendency has been to move from a more flexible, mobile notion of tradition (to which one *relates* rather than be totally determined by it) to a more inflexible, static and un-historical one.

simultaneous existence and composes a *simultaneous order*."³³ Benjamin, and I believe Baudelaire, envisaged the blasting apart of essentialist simultaneity of primal constants which disguises as linear historical progression. Concerning Baudelaire's poetry, the anamnestic flash-backs and abrupt scenic interpolations³⁴ in the broader context of his allegorical predisposition mobilise image-grids that both enhance the present's imbrication in past concerns and highlight the figural, and not simply temporal, proclivities of the experiential gists. Benjamin's formulation of the meaning of the dialectical image merits extensive quoting:

It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past;³⁵ rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. --Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic);³⁶ and the place where one encounters them is language.³⁷

³³ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 38; emphasis added. He concludes the essay by asserting that "he [the poet] is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living" (44). This should be contrasted to Benjamin's "What science has 'determined,' remembrance {*Eingedenken*} can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete" ("Konvolut N: Theory of Knowledge," 471). *Contra* Eliot and his obsession with closed totalities, history for Benjamin is incomplete. The above-cited sentence responds to Horkheimer's critique of (Benjamin's) notion of the incompleteness of history. In general, I believe that Benjamin's complex construal of the dialectical image can be related to Baudelaire's anti-essentialist understanding of history and experience along lines that resist historicist progressivism while not succumbing to ahistoricism.

³⁴ See "Le Cygne," for a narrative that accrues to the juxtaposition of mnemonic scenes with present perceptions in the broader framework of a metamorphosis of urban and historical environments. On the scenic character of history in Baudelaire see Sigrid Weigel, *Body and Image-Space: Re-reading Walter Benjamin*, trans. Georgina Paul with Rachel McNicholl and Jeremy Gaines (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 45.

³⁵ This is what, more or less, Eliot's notion of tradition affirms.

³⁶ Eliot's image-grids accrue to the notion of the archaic. From the simultaneous order of antiquity and modernity that "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" (*Collected Poems 1909-1962*, 59-60) affirms to the mythopoetic infrastructures of *The Waste Land*, and, most important, in the essays, Eliot conceives of history in primal terms, as the translation of primal constants in mundane form. The poetry, however, allows for the possibility of deconstructing this essentialist schema through the homeopathic form it has assumed to act out its traumatic contents. It is only to a significantly lesser degree that the same can be said of the essays.

³⁷ Benjamin, "Konvolut N: Theory of Knowledge," 462.

One should counterpoint this to Eliot's assurances as to the predominance and immutability of the ocular foundations within human perception.³⁸ *The Waste Land*, as I will show promptly, deals with the undoing of ocular stability and aligns the desire to affirm extra-historical moorings in essence with blindness. Tiresias' resumption of experience through empathy and *in-sight* is postural. The Dantean model upon which Eliot bases his pre-modern aesthetic presupposes an organic rationale that is totally irrelevant to the exigencies of modern discursivity.³⁹ It is not accidental that in his "Baudelaire" essay he does not discuss allegory. The Catholic worldview that is transparent behind his formulations is not commensurate with Baudelaire's melancholic allegories of loss and finitude despite Eliot's assertions as to the contrary.⁴⁰ Benjamin is not duped by the religious-decadent decorum⁴¹ and, as usual, strikes at the core of what is involved behind surface similarities. Baudelairean self-estrangement and allegorical fragmentation of self and experience render impossible the reflex mentality that the visionary grasp of the world necessitates: "The decisive ferment which, entering the *taedium vitae* transforms it into *spleen*, is that of self-estrangement. Of the infinite regress of reflection [in Romanticism] ... all that remains in the *Trauer* (sorrow) of Baudelaire is the *tête-à-tête sombre et limpide*

³⁸ See Eliot, "Dante," 210: "Speech varies, but our eyes are all the same."

³⁹ There have been readings of Dante that emphasise the "gap between the sign and the signified [which] cannot be merely wished away in a magical return to a simple and natural relation between representation and reality" (Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Preface," in *Allegory and Representation: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1979-80*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press], ix; apropos of Robert M. Durling's, "Deceit and Digestion in the Belly of Hell," in *Allegory and Representation*, 61-93).

⁴⁰ See Eliot, "Baudelaire," in *Selected Prose*, 231-6. Eliot treats political dissidence and moral revolt as a blasphemous affirmation of the political hegemony and Catholic religiosity eliding thus the political dimension altogether.

⁴¹ On Baudelaire's merely postural Catholicism see Benjamin, "Konvolut J: Baudelaire," 248. The practical reasons behind its adoption show through its aggressive and contradictory character.

(face-to-face, sombre and limpid) of the subject with himself. Herein lies the specific "*Ernst*" (gravity) of Baudelaire. It is just this which hinders the assimilation by the poet of the Catholic worldview which is reconciled with that of allegory only within the category of play."⁴²

The examined poetry jeopardises the primary role of specularity and reference, and the contingency of cognition on them. It exemplifies the recalcitrance of linguistic form to cognitive appropriation and scorns the imperative of cumulative understanding.⁴³ The textual embodiment of cognitive aberration cannot be written off to an aesthetic anxiety aiming at collapsing the antagonism between phenomenal experience and the discursive chora and at foregrounding the putative transparency of the latter to the former. However, the reality remains that in his criticism Eliot's insistence on unified sensibility as the absolute prerequisite for consummate artistic cognition is subsidiary to viewing the aesthetic as a force of convergence of the empirical and the transcendental realms in an ideal reciprocity of concept and phenomenon. His aesthetic is mostly metaphor-based. As I have shown, to the extent that the criticism addresses or accommodates allegory, it is a medieval version of it, totally exhausted within religious-metaphysic parameters.⁴⁴ The reciprocal mediation of the aesthetic,

⁴² Benjamin, "Central Park," 33.

⁴³ See de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 10: "Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration."

⁴⁴ See Eliot's telling statement concerning the two tropological systems: "[A]llegory and metaphor do not get on well together But as the whole poem of Dante is, if you like, one vast metaphor, there is hardly any place for metaphor in the detail of it" (Eliot, "Dante," 210). In this case, Eliot has fused allegory into metaphor as a consequence of his integratist drive. His medieval notion of allegory is based on the conceptual and moral unity of the optically supervised field of human history. Nothing could be further than Benjamin's understanding of allegory as a reifying and melancholic attachment to an always already fragmented history: "That which is touched by the allegorical intention is torn from the context of life's interconnections: it is simultaneously shattered and conserved. Allegory attaches itself to the rubble (*Trümmer*)" (Benjamin, "Central Park," 38).

moral, and political dimensions accrues to the underlying constant of his critical theory, which is the sensuous (*vide* ocular) apprehension of the realm of the concept, i.e., the amalgamation of language and/within the noumenon without any materialist residues. In "Andrew Marvell" he writes that "[T]he wit is not only combined with, but fused into, the imagination."⁴⁵ The aesthetic realm will ultimately be grafted onto a transcendental and derivative notion of experience aiming to affirm the extra-historical and non-contingent moorings of experience: "[wit] is confused with cynicism because it implies a constant inspection and criticism of experience. It involves, probably, a recognition, implicit in the expression of everyday experience, of other kinds of experience."⁴⁶ The combination of wit (a primarily aesthetic, rhetorical entity) with a transcendental configuration of experience is paradigmatic of the systematic imbrication of aesthetic, moral and political categories in Eliot's criticism.⁴⁷ If one contextualises these instances within assertions as to language's immanence to, and subsidiary role vis-à-vis, experience and empirically verifiable reality, then the anti-materialist streak of Eliot's understanding of poetic language becomes clearer. He snaps at Philip Massinger because "Massinger's feeling for language had outstripped his feelings for *things*; *that his eye and vocabulary were not in co-operation.*" Language is supposed to serve cognition in harmony with an ocular integration of experience. He proceeds by praising his (Massinger's)

⁴⁵ Eliot, "Andrew Marvell," 164.

⁴⁶ Eliot, "Andrew Marvell," 170.

⁴⁷ See, also, concerning the imbrication of moral and aesthetic categories, and apropos of the "middle and later years" of Yeats: "a kind of moral, as well as intellectual, excellence" (Eliot, "Yeats," in *Selected Prose*, 252). Also, "he [Thomas Middleton] wrote one tragedy which ... has a profound and *permanent moral value* and horror" (Eliot, "Thomas Middleton," in *Selected Prose*, 195; emphasis added).

contemporaries', and Shakespeare's, "[fusion] into a single phrase [of] two or more diverse impressions." Then he offers his ultimate criterion concerning a successful metaphor in the context of Shakespearean language: "the metaphor identified itself with what suggests it."⁴⁸ The procession from there to the affirmed binding of the intellect to the senses, that is, to a testimonial, verificatory and empiricist screening of experience, feels inevitable: "[W]ith the end of Chapman, Middleton, Webster, Tourneur, Donne we end a period when the intellect was *immediately* at the tips of the senses. *Sensation became word and word was sensation.*"⁴⁹ The refusal to acknowledge language's materialist rupture of the phenomenalist/ocular and cognitive equilibrium is the underlying topos throughout. Eliot is not original at all but merely rehearses a long line of enlightened reasoning in a mildly qualified form. Its cornerstone is the epistemic necessity to unceasingly reaffirm the primacy of logic and grammar over rhetoric, ensuring thus the referential function of language and monitoring all parameters that could erupt upon its representational flow. His assertoric ethos is endemic in all programmes that aim to uphold the collusion of mind and nature. The latter should ideally be attained as and through the unfolding of an appropriative consciousness, and is itself the correlative of what is erroneously considered to be the main Romantic paradigm. His deployment of a metaphysically-charged *conceit*, his "objective correlatives," the metaphysical poets' "wit," virtually most of his methodological tools as defended in his essays, are collateral to the

⁴⁸ See Eliot, "Philip Massinger," 155; emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Eliot, "Philip Massinger," 156; emphasis added.

principle of organic unity, a desired union of emotion and thought, nature and consciousness, and the primacy of analogical thinking.⁵⁰

"When the intellect was at the tip of the senses": embattling the figure⁵¹

The symbiosis of an anthropocentric logic with phenomenalist intuitiveness is apparent throughout. What is of special interest to the current discussion is that this logic is immanently hostile to figural errancy. F. O. Matthiessen, who frequently reads like Eliot's spokesman in compressing and glossing over the latter's telling inconsistencies, manages to condense in periods such as the following an instance of self-contradiction characteristic of the organicist drive lending it its impetus.

Swinburne's aberration was that he tended to blur together sense and sound, to use language merely as musical incantation. As a result he seldom gives us 'clear, visual images'; he uses the most general words more for their association than for any precise denotation; and he rarely conveys the feeling that he has observed any immediate object.⁵²

With an astonishing lack of discerning the contradictory nature of his and Eliot's assertions, he goes on to profess that what bothers Eliot most in Arnold's poetry is the thinness of the musical quality.⁵³ By "general words" he probably means abstract nouns, whereas the blurring of sense and sound, which in itself cannot be

⁵⁰ For "dissociation of sensibility" see "The Metaphysical Poets," 64 passim; for "wit" see "Andrew Marvell," 162, 170 passim. For de-personalisation see "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 40 passim. However, there are continuous modifications of the notion of impersonality throughout the essays. See "Yeats," 251.

⁵¹ See Eliot, "Philip Massinger," 156: "And indeed, with the end of Chapman, Middleton, Webster, Tourneur, Donne we end a period when the intellect was immediately at the tips of the senses. Sensation became word and word was sensation."

⁵² Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot*, 77.

⁵³ See Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, 81.

such a great aberration since it characterises the bipartite organisation of the linguistic sign, cannot be congruent with a usage of language in terms of "musical incantation." Music as a semiological code is semantically void and cannot accommodate sense except in its diluted song version wherein it has been demoted to a medium for words.⁵⁴ Also, the lack of ocular precision is, significantly, targeted as an anomaly. Texts such as the above acquire a particular significance when seen as instances of a certain rationale. It becomes obvious that the sensuous, sense-deficient (*vide* "musical" in the case of Swinburne) aspect of language erupts upon the ideal reciprocity of concepts and phenomenal intuitions. By negative implication, the role of the aesthetic as a common denominator amalgamating the cognitive and phenomenal spheres becomes apparent. It serves in the case of Eliot as the platform upon which the mutual penetration of the orders of knowledge and experience can occur. The enterprise whereby experience fuses into knowledge is underwritten by a persistent nominalism that will culminate in the *Four Quartets*. It edges to a histrionic devolution of language to the condition of a transparent sheet allowing for the putative substance of reality invariants, and the plenitude of cognitive contents, to shine through.⁵⁵ In this common nexus of representations and things there is no space and no need for a transcendental subject, *ergo* Eliot's relevant demand for impersonality. Eliot's "extinction of personality" was a step strategically

⁵⁴ I am not at all convinced by Eliot's assertions that "musical" can be applied to rhythm and meaning, too. The aesthetic valorisation of the "musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the word" is totally arbitrary. As usual, the *aesthetic* criteria behind the evaluation process are missing ("The Music of Poetry," in *Selected Prose*, 113 *passim*).

⁵⁵ Foucault has arraigned the gestural character of the whole endeavour apropos of the classical episteme: "The figures through which discourse passes act as a deterrent to the name, which then arrives at the last moment to fulfill and abolish them. *The name is the end of discourse*. And possibly all Classical literature resides in this space, in this striving to reach a

prerequisite to the individual's unconditional surrender to the moral, political and cultural hegemony, the way he understood it (Eurocentric, Latin, Christian, monarchic). The doctrinal tone throughout many of the essays emanates from the strict adherence to these underlying fundamentals and, I surmise, from the need to shield them from the devastating impact of the negative insights that the poetry compels. These insights concern the necessarily fragmented nature of historical trajectories and the impossibility of upholding essentialist anchoring concerning human experience. Whence the perpetual re-elaborations of the notion of impersonality. In "Yeats," he writes: "The second impersonality is that of the poet who, out of intense and *personal experience*, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol."⁵⁶ De-personalisation is continually modified, if not undone altogether, so that the moral, aesthetic and political injunctions can materialise through penetrating a minimally sustained human vessel.⁵⁷

name that remains always formidable because it exhausts, and thereby kills, the possibility of speech" (Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 117-8).

⁵⁶ Eliot, "Yeats," 251; emphasis added.

⁵⁷ The toning down of de-personalisation is brought into sharper relief when contextualised within the perpetual affirmations of universal moral and emotive fundamentals in accordance with an essentialist logic. Personal emotions transcribe global moral imperatives: "What may be considered corrupt or decadent in the morals of Massinger is not an alteration or diminution in morals; it is simply the disappearance of all the personal and real emotions which this morality supported and into which it introduced a kind of order. As soon as the emotions disappear the morality which ordered it [*sic*] appears hideous" ("Philip Massinger," 159). Contrary to this logic, Baudelaire exposed the political and contingent underpinnings of morality and revealed the social dimensions of moral guilt. See "À une mendiante rousse [To a redheaded beggar girl]" (OC I: 83-5) for a moving self-accusation of the narrator and his moral and aesthetic exoneration of the woman who is forced to beg and probably prostitute herself. In "Je n'ai pas pour maîtresse" (OC I: 203) the narrator exonerates the prostitute-addressee and declares himself to be one more market commodity: "I who sell my thought and would be an author" (cited in Benjamin, "Konvolut J: Baudelaire," 266). Moral injunctions in Baudelaire's poetry are visibly contingent upon social relations of asymmetry and in no way translate or reflect universal constants. Eliot's levelling down of the political (and ultimately historical) dimension into a mundane supplement of essentialist cores is obvious in passages such as the following: "The Elizabethan morality ...provided a framework for emotions to which all classes could respond, and it hindered no feeling. It was not hypocritical and it did not suppress" (Eliot, "Philip Massinger," 159). In

Eliot's foundationalism adheres to a Classical conception of the sign that asserts a structurality of "[d]ifference starting from the secretly varied monotony of the Like."⁵⁸ It climaxes in the notion of the *still centre* in the *Four Quartets*.⁵⁹ The double bind of transcendental fundamentals and mundane experience leaves no space for language, is not one of language itself. It is supposed to lead to the mutual recognition of entities partaking of the same essence, the recognition of self by self. An essential synchrony is reputedly created thus in which beings co-share in essence and which somehow manages to contain a compatible form of temporal reality.⁶⁰

In counterpoint to the theory of language and experience that is overtly or negatively present in the essays, it is essential to return to the poetry and encounter the bracketing of the essays' over-arching moral and aesthetic conceptual paradigms. The poetic oeuvre, from the *Prufrock* poems to the *Waste Land* and even further to the *Four Quartets* (in a more covert form, however), has integrated the possibility of the undoing of this ontology of essence in the form of a modern anti-ontology devoid of metaphysics. I consider it significant that the examined texts elaborate the space/time plexus in proximity to the cultural identity/difference network in a fashion that reveals the intricacy of this relation. The "distance creating a vacuum within the Same"⁶¹ fissures the integrity of the Prufrockian characters making it impossible for them to rest assured in any form

defiance of any notion of historical groundings of experience, Eliot is positive about the existence of "universal emotion[s]" (Eliot, "In Memoriam," in *Selected Prose*, 243).

⁵⁸ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 339.

⁵⁹ See "The Four Quartets," 194: "Only by the form, the pattern, / Can words or music reach / The stillness, as a Chinese jar still / Moves perpetually in its stillness."

⁶⁰ "And all is always now," ("The Four Quartets," 194).

⁶¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 340.

of self-composure. As for the *Waste Land* subjects, the void of essence within ontic identity is experienced as perpetual mutation of identity/ies. The bisexual Tiresias is a good example of this. No stable subjectivity can be solidified under these conditions. The double bind is now one of language and desire operating in a purely asymptotic mode vis-à-vis their referents. Eliot's poetic work accommodates both binds and allows for the understanding of their antagonism and complementarity.

The temporal modalities in *The Waste Land* are ones of prefiguration and a perpetually frustrated announcement of some hidden core of meaning to be excavated in the process. The temporal gap between the anticipation and the event-cum-epiphany is constitutive of the experience of always receding essences. What this temporal chiasmus structures is an experience of unreason that renders the imperative to relate the narrators' experiential patterns in terms of a sequential history of events impossible. As in the case of "Prufrock," experience cannot inhabit its proper meaning-giving conceptual and temporal site. Tiresias and Prufrock cannot reconstitute the essential character of their experience but oscillate in the grips of a bind that is now that of a future-anterior truth and absolute void of essence. Memory storage hinges on a *virtual* archiving of experiential contents in the case of the former character, and a mnemonic synchrony of mutually reverberating cores in the case of the latter. It is telling that Prufrock teases apart the mnemonic threads of a life that is experienced in terms of a saturation of experience ("For I have known them all already, known them all- / Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, / I have measured out my life with coffee spoons; / I know the voices dying with a dying fall") and

convalescence. The latter, however, amounts to resigning to annihilation (“We have lingered in the chambers of the sea / By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown / Till human voices wake us, and we drown”). The exit from auto-affection is for Prufrock the moment of death. In the following chapter I engage the particular character that self-presence assumes and the way the site of this relation to the self is undercut by the constitutively graphematic nature of the event of immanent communication. I then explore the counter-mythic dimensions of *The Waste Land* and its undermining of any notion of primordial experience and its commensurate subjectivity.

CHAPTER TEN

FROM MYTH TO HISTORY: *THE WASTE LAND*

*Prufrock: The voice that speaks silence*¹

Inwardness is the historical prison of
primordial human nature.

Adorno, *Kierkegaard*

"Prufrock" engages the illusional attempt to create a space of interiority that will guarantee cognitive plenitude and mitigate the dispersal of essence caused by temporality and the sort of experience that penetrates the subject as aleatory recurrence of random events. However, the peculiar tension exhibited in the text between a pathic affirmation of interiority based on self-affection and a cynical resignation to randomness signals the distance between what is posited as an effect of desire and its actual potentiation, as much as the textual subject's negative awareness of this distance. I contend that the text impels one to discern the difference inscribed within, and separating, the semiotic and conceptual moments which integrally underwrites the semblance of self-presence and serves as the originary substratum of auto-affection. The tension between blindness to the random and differential character of experience and a near-euphoric abandonment to it is textually integrated, whence the occasional intensity of an expressivist pathos and its subsequent cancelling out.

In Lacanian terms, "Prufrock" exemplifies the demand for the Real, a demand doomed from the outset to yield to the Imaginary dimension. Maud

¹ The allusion is to the chapter "La Voix qui garde le silence" in Derrida, *La Voix et le phénomène*, 78-97.

Ellmann writes with respect to the protagonist's narcissistic postures that "while Narcissus sees himself and makes himself his object, Prufrock sees himself being seen, while 'The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase' fix the self in language and space, estranging it to two exteriorities: and Prufrock owes his selfhood to the other..."² In the light of Lacan's configuration of psychoses, it is clear that the narrator sees himself as an object among others.

They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin'...
They will say: 'But how his legs and arms are thin'

In failing to accede to the Real, for him reality has turned into image empathetically filtered through the consciousness of others. In Lacanian terms, he "captures this object [of desire] in an elaborate intrigue and his *ego* is in the third party by whose mediation the subject enjoys that object in which his question is embodied." For Prufrock, as for the hysterical subject in general, "the technical term 'acting out' takes on its literal meaning since he is acting outside himself."³ Throughout, he indulges in a "disintegrative rhetoric"⁴ punctuated by the logic of an abortive synecdoche. The bodies of others are perceived as a concatenation of fragmented limbs ["And I have known the eyes already, known them all-- / And I have known the arms already .../ Arms that are braceleted and white and bare .../ Arms that lie along a table, or wrap around a shawl"]. The fragmentation to which the perceptual referents have succumbed is indicative of a wider disarray of perception not dissimilar to the one encountered in the poetry of Baudelaire. In

² Maud Ellman, *The Poetics of Impersonality* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), 69.

³ Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," 89-90.

⁴ Maud Ellman, "Impersonality in the Poetry and Criticism of T. S. Eliot" (PhD Diss., Bodleian Library; Oxford: University of Oxford, 1982), ch. I.

both cases, the passage from perception to cognitive appropriation cannot be brought to fulfilment. The withering of experience to which the narrator testifies is non-recuperable since it is not the effect of the loss of something once fully owned. Prufrock has had reality slip right past him in the mode of psychotic denial. The fragments he obsessively belabours cannot be awarded the cognitive closure necessary for the processing of reality. The crooning tone behind his utterances stems from his inability to make the scattered fragments of experience coalesce into an organon of thought. There is no representational import behind the encounter of scenes that are in isolation from explanatory frameworks. Prufrock's screening of impressions does not lead to their matching up with previous ones and therefore they cannot be synthesised into a cognitive ensemble.

Prufrock's dispossession of identity elicits the unsettling realisation that his being has disproportionately inhabited the imaginary dimension, a fact that necessarily impacts on cognitive equilibrium. Lacan writes apropos of the subject's empty speech that "... in this labour which he undertakes to reconstruct *for another*, [to reconstruct a possession of being, a coherent subjectivity] he rediscovers the fundamental alienation that made him construct it *like another*, and which has always destined it to be taken from him *by another*."⁵ The case here is that "Prufrock" compels the understanding of the phantasmatic constitution of subjective identity by verbally externalising the inner frustration of self-owning. The narrator's desire is deflected rather than concentrated into simulacra of human presences ["In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo"]. The others do not reflect his image back to him but refract it in such a way that the

⁵ Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," 42.

mediation of the third party requisite to the stabilisation of self-composure turns into a stumbling block. There is no adequate reply to his demand for recognition. He objectifies himself by displaying himself before a refractive social mirror barring access to the fulfilment of his desire and self-recognition. It is the *jouissance* of the other that internally imperils the constitution of a pacifying self-image.⁶

J. Hillis Miller reads the Prufrockian predicament in the context of what he conceives as spatialisation of time evident throughout the text.⁷ Temporality, according to his reading, is conspicuously absent, and thematised as such. Bereft of it, Prufrock employs two methods in order to attain the hypostasis of a proper subject: *dédoublement de soi* [doubling of the self] and self-dramatisation. In exercising the first, he deploys the stratagem of entering a certain mentality while remaining critical of it.⁸ The same experience seems to be regarded simultaneously from two differing angles."⁹ I am sceptical of Hillis Miller's contentions, or rather of his ultimate aim in diagnosing the dissolution of the temporal realm in this work. Implying that temporality suffices to restore identity or a minimal sense of selfhood must be premised on a linear restorative version of temporality that, I have argued throughout, is the effect of a cover up of diacritical difference. There is a phenomenological streak here and an insistence on categories of consciousness with which I cannot concur. Categorical polarities of

⁶ See Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," 42.

⁷ See J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), 149.

⁸ See G. M. Turnell, "Introduction to the Study of Tristan Corbière," *Criterion* XV (1935-36): 397, for an analogous strategy in Tristan Corbière.

⁹ Characteristically, Eliot infantilises the unsettling implications of this perspectival duality upon any notion of stable subjectivity by treating it as an effect of the need "to escape reality" and one's moral responsibilities. See T. S. Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1972), 130.

subjectivity are countered here along with the immanent essence to which they must be collateral. It is in this respect that I believe the text parts from phenomenological accounts of temporality that would purport to reconstitute selfhood as identity unfolding in homogeneous time. This configuration of temporality has always attempted to constrain differentiability within the interstices of immanent self-presence.

Another facet of Prufrock's monologue is a defensive conflict within sexuality. It cannot be isolated from the broader context of the subject's relation to the outside world, especially as it is organised around the axis of rejection of an idea from consciousness, or the projection of self-reproach on to external reality ("And I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, ..."). The text is suffused with impotence-phobia and a latent aversion to the feminine realm that indicate a wider social performance anxiety and concern over social integration. Prufrock seems to articulate the rupture between ego and reality in a most characteristic way in the autistic withdrawal accompanying an *etherised* relaxation of consciousness. The sex phobia permeating the text along with its correlative subtle misogynistic aura ("[T]he women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo") is a direct effect of the frustration of sexual orientation entailed upon the dissolution of sedimented identity. Finally, he experiences the non-coalescence of intention and expression in the same way as the non-commensurability of his desire and its human targets, as the ultimate affliction. The latter is ultimately translated into semantic/cognitive terms: "It is impossible to say just what I mean!" A cleavage between cognition and enunciative performance is articulated here, the impossibility of acceding to one's own history

not because of a personal handicap, but because of the objective, universal, and inevitable opening on to the exteriority of language, which entails irreversible alienation and dissolution of subjectivity.¹⁰

The non-commensurability of discourse and phenomenal cognition that clots the aesthetic interlocking of experience and language is the underlying concern of the poem. Prufrock's soliloquy falls under the rubric of auto-affection that purports to accrue to non-temporal immanent sense. However, the interiority of his *s'entendre-parler* [hear-oneself-speak] is radically contradicted by the semiotic and temporal nature of all signification processes. The sheer impossibility of teasing out the temporal dimension from the interiorised stringing out of supposedly originary impressions must be emphatically abstracted. The unhindered unfolding of duration would ideally allow for differentiability within the interstices of transcendental self-presence, self-identity. Yet, Prufrock wakes up to the reality of deferred sense and *drowns*. The I that purported to affirm plentiful sense experiences immersion into difference-producing discourse as annihilation. Derrida highlights the abortive character of immutable, non-temporal and un-historical sense production through phenomenological self-consciousness the following way: "Auto-affection is not a modality of experience characterising a state that would already be self-identical (*autos*). It produces the same as relation to the self inside the Difference to oneself, the same as non-identical.... What makes the originality of discourse [parole] is that its substance is purely temporal.

¹⁰

See Derrida, "Force and Signification," n. 23, 303: "Because to speak is to know that thought must become alien to its self in order to be pronounced and to appear. It wishes, then, to take itself back by offering itself. This is why one senses the gesture of withdrawal, of retaking possession of the exhaled word, beneath the language of the authentic writer."

This temporality does not string out a sense that would be non-temporal. Sense, before the stage of its expression, is integrally temporal" (92-3).¹¹

With Derrida's insights framing my understanding of the examined texts, I discern in the poetry up to *The Waste Land* the textual inscription of the contradictory nature of the demand for sense afflatus in detachment from the agency of language. Experiencing language as parasitical upon reality ultimately exacerbates the withering of cognitive certainties and leads to experience devolving to an interminable pursuit of what supposedly falls outside its jurisdiction. The drive for transcendence that the *hollow men* and the Prufrockian characters in general exemplify is a negative indicator of the subjects' inability to cope with a subliminally felt sense of irretrievable loss and finitude at the core of their experience. The tensional dialectic of negative insight into, and blindness to, the constitutive absence of immutable essence and sense within experience subtends Baudelaire and Eliot's texts and explains their unappeasable melancholia.

In the *Hollow Men* the trace through which one is called upon to conceive of the living present is but the one left behind by the subject's struggle with language mediation. The mediating agency of the signifier underwrites the struggle with the "Shadow" which is conducted by the narrator as if it were an exorcism, through psychotic invocations and a self-corrosive melancholia that is a negative pointer to the dissolution of his subjectivity. This dissolution relates to the temporality which Prufrock experiences as a factor that disturbs mental stability and fosters ambivalence: "Do I dare disturb the universe? / In a minute

¹¹ See also Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 194-5: "The present as the recurrence of difference, as repetition giving voice to difference, affirms at once the totality of chance.... If being always declares itself in the same

there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse." Despite his effort to conciliate subjective interiority with some form of temporality, he fails to sense one commensurate with his imperilled inwardness.¹² Within this realm the impossibility of cementing subjectivity in absolute, constitutive terms is put into relief.¹³

The transitivity latent in the "Hollow Men" is not dissimilar to the one encountered in "Prufrock." It takes the removal of successive layers of self-affectivity¹⁴ to give in to the agency of language even if experienced as the annihilation of the self. Prufrock finally wakes from the lethargy of self-enclosure and immanent sense only to hear human voices calling him to the world of language and history. He wakes and submits to death.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back

way, it is not because being is one, but because the totality of chance is affirmed in the single dice throw of the present."

¹² Both concerning Eliot and Baudelaire's protagonists, Derrida's words are pertinent: "To hear-oneself-speak is not the interiority of an inside enclosed within itself, it is the irreducible opening within the interior space [dedans], the eye and the world inside discourse [parole]. The phenomenological reduction is a scene" (*La Voix et le phénomène*, 96).

¹³ Derrida's critique of the Husserlian economies of subjectivity helps understand the internally fallacious nature of the conceptual categories upon which the defensive subjectivity belaboured by Eliot's soliloquising subjects devolves: "It is not accidental that he [Husserl] construes this unnameable as 'absolute subjectivity,' that is, as a being thought on the basis of presence as substance, *ousia*, *upokeimenon*: self-identical being which translates substance into subject What is unnameable according to Husserl is only the "absolute properties" of this subject that is therefore configured in accordance with the classical metaphysical scheme that distinguishes substance (present being) from its attributes There is no constitutive subjectivity. We must deconstruct to the point of constitution" (*La voix et le phénomène*, 96).

¹⁴ Derrida undoes the metaphysical layering upon which self-affectivity depends: "If indication does not add itself to expression, which in its turn is not added to [prelinguistic] sense, one can speak in this case of an originary 'supplement': their addition comes to fill up a fundamental lack, a lack of self-presence which is originary" (*La Voix et le phénomène*, 97).

When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us and we drown.¹⁵

¹⁵ Eliot, *Collected Poems*, 17.

***The Waste Land*: primordial nature and the asubjectivity of myth**

[T]he myth is not presented for its own sake, but as a vehicle for universal meaning.

T. S. Eliot, "Yeats"

As long as there is still one beggar around, there will still be myth.

Benjamin, "Konvolut K"

In the case of *The Waste Land* there has been an unusual critical consensus concerning the textual cathexis on a static model of experience and history, the preponderance of spatial models, and an attachment to the mythopoetic dimension. All these are pointers to the desire for self-grounding and hypostatisation of essence. A repetition compulsion serves as the organising principle behind the discursive kernels. It aims at the mastery of originary absence through the lumping together of mythemes and fragments of historical reality deracinated from wider explanatory cultural frameworks. The discursive acting out of what is experienced as primary fragmentation of the organic realm (as either cultural tradition or history) can only aim at the interlocking of non-commensurate compounds which must be coerced into forming historically meaningful copulas or organically linked series. However, the desired fusion of the fragments into a coherent whole is never attained. The primordial and ever-receding experience to which the narratives allude, the experience insinuated in terms of originary trauma, is never affixed or recalled as a prototype.¹⁶ Even in

¹⁶ An unattainable primal scene lurks beneath the four sections of the poem. In "The Burial of the Dead," and behind the kaleidoscopic merging of various narrational voices from "Marie" going down on a sled feeling frightened to a masculine voice promising to show (her?) "fear in a handful of dust" to the "hyacinth girl," and finally to the narrator addressing "Stetson," the companion in a primeval archaic, yet historically recognisable, experience of war, the underlying stress is on staving off a primordial danger that is formally indistinct yet can hit the subject at any time. The attitude throughout betrays the attempt to preempt the core of traumatic event or work through it by integrating it into a mnemonic and/or cultural series once it has settled in. In "The Fire Sermon" Tiresias the blind seer attempts to empathetically resume the essence of history and human experience within him in the form of a perennial catastrophe that keeps recurring in every

the earlier *Sweeney* poems trauma and origin could not be localised as recognisable empirical data. Likewise, within the narrational economy of the *Waste Land* the ancient and modern predicaments are juxtaposed in a way that makes impossible their ranking in terms of importance. Agamemnon's murder is seen to be commensurate with modern afflictions,¹⁷ Tiresias is witness to a putatively essential scene perpetually reenacted throughout history, and all are reciprocally defined in a state of internal commutation.

The compulsive need to resume and reenact an archetypal traumatic experience has attained obsessional intensity. The allusions to Hellenic tragedy and history, the Upanishads and the Grail myth, point to a mytho-poetic logic that fails to discriminate between history and myth. I consider the philological aspect of the mythical frameworks to be of no consequence to this discussion. What is significant, however, is that the interplay of all relevant poles accrues to a sense of past conflict. Its core is alien to the subject. It is imperative that the impossibility for the subject to accede to his/her own history in terms of a linear conceptual and mnemonic annexation¹⁸ of a primary trauma or primal scene be linked with the impossibility of acceding to the historical and the temporal dimensions regarded as *genesis spontanea* of originary impressions (the phenomenological angle) or an essentially defined dialectical synthesis of event-clusters (the historicist one).¹⁹

age and surfaces via sexual morbidity and moral deprivation, from the mechanical and uninspired copulation of the female typist with the "young man carbuncular" to the rape in Margate Sands which is suffered with a resignation that points to the bankruptcy of moral shields. The same can more or less be shown concerning the other two sections.

¹⁷ See "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," in Eliot, *Collected Poems*, 60.

¹⁸ Memory does not seem to be an explicit concern of the poem. Where it is addressed, however, it is linked with the exacerbation of the subject's capacity to relate to experience in terms other than perpetual metamorphoses of givens: "'Do you know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember / Nothing ? / I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes'" ("The Waste Land," 67). In this case the coherence secured whenever a response is formulated is purely citational.

¹⁹ See Derrida, *La Voix et le phénomène*, 93.

The text allows for the possibility that history itself must be construed on the basis of *différance*²⁰ and exposes the mythic character of the impenetrable primal scene²¹ around which the fragmented narratives orbit. The rhetorical arrangement of *The Waste Land* organises the acting out of the pathogenic trauma or conflict in an attempt at imbuing it with meaning. The struggle also aims at levelling the contradictions immanent in an agon which is fought over the viability of the organic dimension itself. However, instead of the reunification of the fractional givens, what is effected is a fragmentation to the second degree. All the subjects are left with a series of recurring hallucinatory sensations and symbols of illness, sexual and natural sterility.

Eliot's erection of such a mythopoetic scaffold occurred in the context of an intense interest in a by now hopelessly *depassée* anthropology.²² In the wake of structural anthropology we are now able to discern in the mythical taxonomies an acentric character making it impossible to decode them as synecdochic manifestations of a cognitively decipherable core. The formal morphologisations of the mythical parameter do not arrest diacritical force or secure a plenitude of presence. The logic governing the mytho-morphemes is relational, self-referential, and thoroughly semiotic. It is a logic that fashions myth as a series of surface-nexuses, which, however, resist the organicist

²⁰ *Différance* in the sense of the deferral of the ultimate cognitive or hermeneutic closure that will signal the satisfaction of understanding; also, in the sense of the difference between the force of the event and its signification in the broader context of testimonial un-accountability.

²¹ I use this Freudian term in a "de-sexualised" sense. Its intriguing aspect emanates from the ambiguity surrounding its factual verifiability or intrinsic facticity. See Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 335-6: "it is only through a deferred action (*nachträglich*) that it is grasped and interpreted by the child [I]t constitutes a happening which may be of the order of myth but which is *already given* prior to any meaning which is attributed to it after the fact."

²² I am referring to James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1924).

coerciveness of cognition or the regression of signification into an attribute of understanding. Claude Lévi-Strauss' views critically address all notions of a pure archaic origin uncorrupted by temporality and *différance*. These notions are invalidated by the tropological organisation of the examined text. The agony of the narrativ protagonists transcribes the impossibility of absolute organic embedment and their abandonment to the exteriority of the signifier at the very moment of speech and conceptual reasoning. From its inception thought is given over to alterity whereas the textual subjects are alienated from their own meaning-giving environment despite their introspective and empathetic efforts to ascribe meaning to an inchoate collection of drives. Observing the language emitted by the textual narrators brings one close to the phenomenology of the psychoses. What is inculcated in the interruptions of their discursive flow is the possibility not of an expressivist entropy but a total absence of sense.

The broken fingernails of dirty hands
My people humble people who expect
Nothing.'

la la
To Carthage then I came
Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest
burning

This discursive segmentation does not eventually coalesce into stable associative structurality, as an organicist reading would have us believe, and is not a momentary aberration. Lacan has shed light upon this phenomenon in a way that applies not only to the psychotic subject but also elucidates a broader

predicament of/within language: "Here we go to the heart of the function of the sentence in itself, *insofar as it does not necessarily carry its meaning with it*. I am thinking of this phenomenon of sentences that emerge in his ~~as~~^ubjectivity as interrupted, leaving the sense in suspense The interruption evokes a fall which, while it may be indeterminate over a wide range, cannot be just any old one."²³

I cannot engage the totality of Lacan's insights here but only point to the relevance of the inherently asymptotic relation of utterance and meaning, of indication and expression, of intention and signification, enhanced where the negotiation between self and reality falters. To a certain degree, discursive segmentation, and all it entails, is not the fate of the delusional or paranoid only. What I wish to emphasise through these detours into the analytical terrain is the impossibility of acceding to the historical dimension both in the personal sense and also in terms of the grand linear, extrinsic, and all-engulfing detour of past and present reality. This impossibility does not emanate from a pathological state. It is the effect of the mediatory and materialist intervention of language and the internal distance between its constative and performative axes. It is put into relief through the self-consciously figural dimension of the text. I do not wish to replicate the normalising patterns of a certain branch of psychoanalysis whose ultimate aim is the fabrication of a sense of self and assimilable experience here.

²³ Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses* (London: Routledge, 1993), 100, apropos of Schreber's case; emphasis added. As for the asubjective nature of desire and the call for the other, see Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 190-91. Wilden writes: "The absolute character of the subject's desire matches his original status as an 'absolute subject.' But the absolute subject is an inexpressible, asubjective entity, since the absolute subject is a contradiction in terms, whether it be the primordial monad or the goal of the Hegelian *Phenomenology*."

Because of this, I have chosen to selectively deploy Jacques Lacan's metapsychological contentions. Ultimately, whether as introjected mnemonic symbols or historiographical referents, the historical segments cannot coalesce into a coherent and cognitively decoded organism. The texts narrate their constitutive difficulty in inhabiting the concept that they promise.

The giving oneself over to alterity voiced by Prufrock ["I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. / I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each"] is not foreign to the *Waste Land* subjects. Its expression does not lead to a binding of the mythical morphemes into historical predicates, or to the creation of genuinely organic syntagmata. Myths are in the final analysis anonymous, and the absence of their centre "is here the absence of a subject and the absence of an author."²⁴ The textual speakers' mode of re-integrating their personal histories into the objective history that engulfs them turns out to be self-destructive. The *Waste Land* articulates a discourse that is mythopoetic *itself* and does not thus evade the aporias emanating from the fact.

The theme of finitude penetrates the textual series either in the form of an anthropological analytic of death or as the overwhelming of the subject by time and loss. To the extent that the text shares in the modern experience, its analytic of finitude is susceptible of the deracination of positive contents caused by the emergence of language as a force that disturbs analogical representation. Eliot's work up to *The Waste Land* conceives of finitude in a way that discreetly addresses the erosion of essential foundations and the conditioning of man by language. A modern anti-ontology shapes up in his poetry that accommodates an

²⁴ Lacan, *The Psychoses*, 287.

analytic of non-sublimated death with the sensuousness of language. It reveals the linguistic dimension to be in a condition of exogeneity and excess with regard to the conceptual assimilation of reality. This excess is testified to by discursive repetitions and circumlocutionary instances behind which crystallises the logic of a perpetual elaboration of an experientially void space. The possibility of construing the analytic of death in language terms, as pure literalness, as the destruction of any symbolic, metaphoric potential that could bind the sphere of materiality with that of transcendence, becomes a palpable option. This anti-ontology undercuts a text such as *Ash-Wednesday* too, heavy though it may be with religiosity. In the monotonous and obsessive periodicity of its component units it attains to the effect of a de-semanticised algorithm. The antagonism between performance and constation inherent in language is highlighted in this text that has collapsed religious invocation to senseless discursive pattern. Equally, the dialectical interfusion of the *fire* and the *rose* of the *Four Quartets*, i.e., the transcendental and material dimensions, cannot conceal the oxymoronic character of a union which can only be attempted at the cost of a systematic forgetting (of difference) and a pervasive denial (of the temporal annihilation of essence).²⁵

Identity is elaborated as a datum that is an effect of discursive iterability and the periodic recurrence of anterior verbal motifs. Neither the linear time of

²⁵ See the last lines of the "Four Quartets," *Collected Poems*, 222-23. The climactic moment when the "fire" and the "rose" prove to be of one essence is supposed to perfect the dialectic of materiality and transcendence. History is affirmed on the surface while being substantially voided in this dialectic whose scales incline to the latter pole. From "History is now and England" to "the crowned knot of fire," the trajectory leads from the pragmatics of concrete social action to the de-materialised unhistorical and transcendental essence undergirding, and materialising in, history.

Classical experience nor Bergsonian *durée* are relevant in supporting the textual discursive identities. The "mixing of memory and desire" from the inceptive moment of the diegesis renders impossible the minimal closure of identity options requisite to the grasping of stable subjectivity patterns. The narrational voices slide into one another in a *mélange* that frustrates any potential personological demarcations. What is pertinent to my argument is that within the Eliotic scene what is re-enacted is the impossibility of attaining either to a harmony of essences or a historicity proper to man wherein intention can ideally coalesce with signification, indication can be attuned to the exigencies of expression, and expression can add itself to pre-linguistic sense. The text elicits the realisation that it is self-undermining to graft the notion of identity onto self-affectivity without expecting to be necessarily led to the agency of the signifier-trace and the temporal character of sense. As I have shown through recourse to Jacques Derrida's *La Voix et le phénomène*, self-affectivity and subjectivity-aggrandisement are deconstructible even at the level of constitution.

The disempowerment of time and history observable in *The Waste Land* is not simply the negative effect of an underlying scepticism towards the historical integration of contents. It can also be seen as part of a defensive attempt at historical resumption through the intensification of presence and the arrestation of temporal and experiential fluidity. The Eliotic subject desires the reactivation of a certain version of history but in such a way as to secure the ratcheting up of historical moments into a sense-imposing vault ["There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson! / 'You who were with me in the ships at

Mylae!"]²⁶ History is here grasped as "the movement of a resumption of history, as a detour between two presences."²⁷ I argue that the compulsive character of this resumption and the melancholia emitted by the narrator(s), point to the wilfulness behind the endeavour. These fragments countenance the positing power of language and the performative erasure of this power through the mechanism of temporal elasticity and figural displacements. The temporal displacement allowing for the movement from the narratival present to ancient Greece is the correlative of tropological trajectories based on the contiguity of signifiers, and not sense associations, like that of metonymy. Both this positing and its erasure can be seen to respond to the radically aleatory positionality of the historical ensembles, which subsequently yields to the imbrications of essentialism. Figural errancy is geared towards holistic symbolicity. The *Waste Land* can be read as the working through of the metamorphosis of discursive events into historical and aesthetic monuments.

Paul de Man apropos of Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* writes of the power of a self-threatening knowledge included therein and stated negatively. A certain negative assurance is allegorised raising thus the suspicion that "the negation is a *Verneinung*, an intended exorcism."²⁸ I argue that, in a compatible manner, the internal mode of development of *The Waste Land* revolves around the overcoming

²⁶ History for Eliot has throughout been a matter of a simultaneous order, of an essential infrastructure monitoring human experience: "This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional" ("Tradition and the Individual Talent," 38).

²⁷ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," in *Writing and Difference*, 291.

²⁸ De Man, "Shelley Disfigured," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 122. This essay brings to the fore the examined texts' self-sufficiency, in the sense that the texts themselves have always already thematically embedded the possibility of their own deconstruction. In a way, the texts have already anticipated, and resisted, the imposition of meaning inflicted on them by all hermeneutic praxes.

of catastrophe through the homeopathic reenactment of its crisis and the re-figuration of its relational components. At the same time, the failure to exorcise the threat "becomes precisely the challenge to understanding that always again demands to be read. And to read is to understand, to question, to know, to forget, to erase, to deface, to repeat."²⁹ De Man relates all this to rhetorical prosopopoeia, the trope by which the dead assume a face and voice only to tell the allegory of their demise. What is revealed, though, behind apostrophising the dead, behind the creation of simulacra of presence, is the impossibility of essentialising what is merely the effect of rhetorical play. In Derrida's words, "Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around."³⁰ If the periodicity of the self-positional matrices creates the illusion of an empirically recognisable homogeneous datum, a reading that is absolutely disfiguring, disincarnating of essence and in the final analysis absolutely *literal*, can be counterproposed vis-à-vis the representation of these "data of reality." *The Waste Land* lets emerge the possibility that no degree of phenomenal knowledge can stop the excess of the tropological dimension, of a generalised prosopopoeia. In a way, every human figure in the poem narrates the story of its demise, of its impossibility to accede to the order of presence, but most of all Tiresias, the leading narrator. This narration of an impossible presence is neither to be welcomed nor to be deplored.³¹ The corpse that *Stetson* planted in his garden, and must at all costs remain buried, undisturbed by the "sudden frost"

²⁹ De Man, "Shelley Disfigured," 122.

³⁰ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 292.

³¹ See de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," 120: "What would be naive is to believe that this strategy, which is not *our* strategy as subjects, since we are its products rather than its agent, can be a source of value and has to be celebrated or denounced accordingly."

and the nails of the "Dog, friend to man," just like the "dead man" that "mid that beauteous scene .../ Rose with his ghastly face;..." in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, allegorises the monumentalisation of the subject for the benefit of future archaeologists applying their hermeneutic force.³² However, in de Man's words: "Reading as disfiguration [i.e., as resistance to the coercion of the figure into acting as symbol], to the very extent that it resists historicism, turns out to be historically more reliable than the products of historical archaeology. To monumentalize this observation into a *method* of reading would be to regress from the rigor exhibited by Shelley which is exemplary precisely because it refuses to be generalised into a system."³³ Only the reading that embraces the figural dimension without reducing it to an effect of symbolic/metaphorical potential can escape the regression de Man writes about. From the disintegrative acting out of primal traumatic scenes bearing the name "Tiresias" to the encounter with the "dead master" in *Little Gidding*³⁴ the same inability to imbue perceptual givens with cognitive stability hampers the narrators. Whether imaginary, remembered, fabricated or not, the scenes slide into the abject field of prosopopoeia wherein rules the disfiguration of faces and bodies and the disowning of personal experience. As in Baudelaire, mechanical *Gedächtnis* overwhelms empathetic memory. The rigor exhibited by Eliot lies in his nowhere smoothing over the edges of semantic unresolve fissuring what on the surface is brought forth as need

³² See "The Waste Land," in *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, 65.

³³ De Man, "Shelley Disfigured," 123.

³⁴ See "Four Quartets," in *Collected Poems*, 217.

and demand. The prosopopoeia has conspicuously failed to enhance the image of the dead.³⁵

/ I was still the same,
Knowing my self yet being someone other--
And he a face still forming; yet the words sufficed
To compel the recognition they preceded.
And so, compliant to the common wind,
Too strange to each other for misunderstanding,
In concord at this intersection time
Of meeting nowhere, no before and after,
We trod the pavement in a dead patrol.
I said: 'The wonder that I feel is easy,
Yet ease is the cause of wonder. Therefore speak:
I may not comprehend, may not remember.'³⁶

³⁵ See Maud Ellman, "Eliot's Abjection," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, ed. John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 197: "[*The Waste Land*'s] ruling logic is 'prosopopeia', as Paul de Man has defined the trope The many ghosts that haunt *The Waste Land* ... bespeak the need to give a face and voice to death."

³⁶ Eliot, "Four Quartets," 217.

The Waste Land: History as Diacritics

Politics attains primacy over [primal] history. The facts become something that just now first happened to us, first struck us; to establish them is the affair of memory. Indeed, awakening is the great exemplar of memory.

Benjamin, "Konvolut K"

In this section I will elaborate the dialectic of self-enhancement and self-negation in the broader framework of what the text presents as the collapse of historical experience. The text marks the culmination of the above dialectic and, most significantly, inscribes it within a mythicopoetic platform, the mythical deep structure underpinning the multi-prismatic textual surfaces.

It is immediately apparent that both the thematised predicament and the response to it are determined in terms of myth (the Grail legend, the Attis myths, ancient Greek characters snatched out of context [Tiresias], etc). Most critics have highlighted the centrality of the mythical undercurrent without, however, accounting for the consequences that this configuration entails. Their views converge on the predominant role of the text's synchronic, inclusive spatial perspective that allegedly consists in the reflexive juxtaposition of past and present and the negation of temporality. This negation is usually approached as the effect of a hypertrophic subjective idealism in the sense of the capacity of the narratorial subject to sediment an organic, synchronic realm in which historical kernels can co-exist in a state of mutual recognition and inclusiveness, and always in accordance with a logic that assigns primacy to spatial perception.³⁷ I believe

³⁷ See J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality* for the subjective idealism in question. Some of the most important studies on the poem which seem to be mutually attuned concerning spatial perception are the following: Helen Gardner, "The Dry Season: 'The Waste Land,'" in Bradley Gunter, ed., *The Merrill Studies in "The Waste Land"* (Columbus: Charles Merrill Publishing Company, 1971), 67-78; Elizabeth Drew, *T. S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1950); Cleanth Brooks, "'The Waste Land': Critique of the Myth," in Bradley Gunter, ed., *op. cit.*, 37-66; Elizabeth Schneider, *The Pattern in the Carpet* (Berkeley: University

that such commentaries strain the issue. Instead, as William Spanos argues, "space, or rather the tradition of spatial perception embodied in the figure of Tiresias, is the problem rather than the solution of the poet-protagonist."³⁸ The mere affirmation of the strategic enhancement of the spatial dimension fails to adequately address textual niches of semantic unresolve.

The problematic aspect of these critics' contentions is their referring this augmented spatial dimension to an all-inclusive, integratist consciousness allegedly resuming all history in itself and effecting thus the consolidation of a simultaneous experiential curve. I argue for the legitimacy of approaching the text in terms of "simultaneous disorder"³⁹ and the discrediting of the apparently desired voices of dead presences that the text compulsively conjures. The uninhibited expansion of these voices would ideally restore temporality, fertility, and duration. The underlying wistfulness is obvious from the very beginning judging from the impeded mode of narrativial development with its frequent regressions and interpolations of micro-narratives, and the apathetic rhetoric of melancholy and sterility fissuring the demand until the very end. The all-inclusive consciousness in question fails to harmonise its referents.

Throughout, one encounters the eradication of identity-boundaries and distinctions of identity that separate subject from subject, selfhood from other. Eliot's notorious note for line 218⁴⁰ undermines notions of self-recognition and

of California Press, 1975); Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

³⁸ William Spanos, "Repetition in 'The Waste Land': A Phenomenological De-struction," *Boundary 2*, XII (spring 1979): 231.

³⁹ Ellman, "PhD Diss.," 198.

⁴⁰ Eliot, *Collected Poems*, 82: "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly

self-differentiation since it stresses the "osmosis of identities more than their reunion in a central consciousness."⁴¹ Tiresias, in his bisexuality, comes to encompass both sexes' experience, mix self and other, in an ambivalent merge of difference and hypothetically immutable essence.⁴² He can see nothing literally, and yet he is expected to disentangle the essential fibre of experience through recourse to *in-sight*, the ability to fore-suffer and re-enact what can only be a core of essence underlying all experience unaffected by history and time. I contend, however, that what transpires behind this essentialist scheme is not the re-enactment of an essence-replete experiential matrix but the acting out of unassimilable trauma according to the logic of repetition-compulsion.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
 Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
 Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
 I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
 Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see

 The typist home at teatime...
 I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
 Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest--
 I too awaited the expected guest.

 (And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
 Enacted on the same divan or bed;
 I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
 And walked among the lowest of the dead.)⁴³

Far from the recapitulation of experience within an integratist

distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem."

⁴¹ Ellman, *The Poetics of Impersonality*, 97.

⁴² See Maud Ellman, "Eliot's Abjection," 181: "[T]he horror of *The Waste Land* lies in its osmoses, exhalations, and porosities, for this miasma is the symptom of disintegrating boundaries."

⁴³ Eliot, *Collected Poems*, 71-2.

consciousness, what is affirmed here is the constitutive blindness at the core of experience. The foresuffering in question is pure abstraction from the pragmatics of experience and reflects the desire to reconstitute sense and essence in an empathetic mode. Since the seer is blind the movement from the imperceptible scene to its conceptual belabouring is a rhetorical effect rather than a genuine transcendental crossover. The history-transcending immanent experience proves to be an effect of figuration. At the same time, the absence of sensory perception negatively reveals the privileged status accorded to vision as a *sine qua non* to our conceptual elaboration of reality. Tiresias speaks in the grip of an irresolvable antinomy. He tries to substitute empathetic immanence for sense perception. However, the figures of speech he employs throughout derive from the realm of the latter [can see.../ Perceived the scene...]. These figures bar access to the transcendental field of unhistorical immanence. The movement from the literal perception to the transcendental empathetic immanence is an effect of rhetoric rather than a genuine leave-taking of the phenomenal. The thread connecting the two realms is the desire to empathise with the core of universal affliction, and naturally presupposes an underlying human essence non-susceptible to alterations effected by history.

The depersonalised subject witnesses the perpetual disruption of the historical realm and its diffraction into fragmented clusters which, as written and historic *plagiats*,⁴⁴ have turned absolutely literal, i.e., have been deprived of any symbolic or metaphorical potential. The experience he struggles to express defies all notions of historical origination seen either in terms of collective or personal

⁴⁴ On the *plagiat* see Guerlac, *The Impersonal Sublime*, 155, 215 fn. 15.

agency. The destruction of personal inflexions in the text voids the affirmation of constants of experience and renders the protagonist's re-enactment of a putatively universal experience/affliction merely gestural. The notion of a homogeneous self-coalescent subject that would lend credit to the latter has been annulled.

History in *The Waste Land* has been written off to concatenation of ruins that engulf the speaker(s) in a citational plethora. Far from emanating from the ancestral voice of tradition, the historical debris haunts the narrators as literary echoes. The paradoxical nature of the pursuit of immutable historical essence gradually crystallises as a constitutively abortive articulation of history through the medium that guarantees the diffraction of essence and the deracination of its positive contents, i.e., figural language. The "historical" personages glide in and out in a state of citational permutation that renders any notion of distinct identity fallacious. In Ellmann's words:

Moreover, the speaker cannot be identified with his creator, not because he has a different personality, like Prufrock, but because he has no stable identity at all. The disembodied "I" glides in and out of stolen texts, as if the speaking subject were merely the quotation of its antecedents. Indeed, this subject is the victim of a general collapse of boundaries.⁴⁵

The textual narrators modulate between a coherentist channelling of disparate experiential material into archaic underpinnings and a narcissistic interfusion of mortal and living figures within the zone of the self.⁴⁶ Another

⁴⁵ Ellman, *The Poetics of Impersonality*, 92.

⁴⁶ See Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language," 90: "The obsessional subject drags into the cage of his narcissism the objects in which his question reverberates back and forth in the multiplied alibi of mortal figures and, subduing their heady acrobatics, addresses its ambiguous homage towards the box in which he himself has his seat, that of the master who cannot be seen or see himself."

dimension is offered by Helen Gardner who relates the diffraction of the subject to the dissolution of the city while emphasising that "there are no characters in the strict sense, no persons."⁴⁷ She seems to have intuited, rather than grasped in a theoretically coherent way, the state wherein the narrativial subjects succumb to mutual infiltration, a state of interpenetrability of identities. Simultaneously with this condition of identity transmigration, however, and in proportion to it, lies an obsessive attempt of the narrativial subject to repel what he senses as the abject Other.⁴⁸ This latter is exemplified by the crowd of the dead flowing over London Bridge, or the corpse buried in Stetson's garden;⁴⁹ or even by the female presences one of which, Philomela, has suffered the violence of rape, while another, the typist, exemplifies the banality of unreciprocated, tedious, and uninspired sexual intercourse. Philomela's rape has deprived her of speech, which translates the inscription of discourse within an economy of self-possession and sovereignty. This sub-sensical excitement with repulsion, with the abject and uncanny, undergirds the poem's discursive acting out of what it targets as repulsive, in accordance with a ritualistic homeopathic rationale.

The text has been smoothed out by most of the commentators above into a critique of the fragmentation of history and the subversion of the metaphysical

⁴⁷ Gardner, "The Dry Season: 'The Waste Land,'" 70.

⁴⁸ The "Other" in the sense of the space of intersubjectivity that any real or imaginary interlocutor opens up. My usage of the term partially overlaps with Lacan's *Other*. See Anica Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge, 1970), 157: "The Other is [apart from language/the symbolic, the unconscious, and the third party witness invoked in analysis] the site of the intersubjectivity of patient and analyst, and hence the analytic dialogue. 'The Other is the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks with him who hears' (*Écrits*, 19)."

⁴⁹ See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3-4: "[T]he corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. The border has become an object. How can I be without border? The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject." The boundaries between life and death are indiscriminate in the poem and the corpse enhances the sense of permanent threat, of the imminent irruption of forces hostile to life.

deep structure underpinning the foundations of Western onto-theology. This appreciation slurs over the fact that in its tropological organisation the text disrupts what it laments as vanishing. In its "citational abyss"⁵⁰ it decentres not only any hypothetical modicum of organised subjectivity, but also the ontological substratum prerequisite to its validation. In deploring absence, it restitutes it as the instigator of asymptotic desire. The subject is gradually metamorphosed into linguistic surface upon which idioms and languages merge. In Harriet Davidson's formulation:

"The Waste Land" enacts a loss of the other which is also a discovery of the insufficiency of the self (fear of death) and the entry into the linguistic world. The poem has a wish to return to a nonrelational and static state, a wish brought on by the fear of death and time which results from the initial separation from the other. In the poem, the other is simultaneously spurned as a symbol of the insufficiency of the self and yearned for as completing and annihilating the self. But the only positive conclusion can be an acceptance of the absence of the other in the self.⁵¹

The disturbing absence of personae (the narrators do not cover up for the author or a central encompassing consciousness split up in distinct shapes), the impossibility of reconciling the various voices into an inclusive, controlling consciousness, translates the irreparable absence of essence at the core of experience and history that constitutes the true concern of the text. "These fragments I have shored against my ruins"⁵² ambiguously points to either the inevitability or deplorability of the narrator's condition.

I wish to stress the self-undermining nature of the demand to resuscitate the voice of the dead literary ancestors and thus revive organic tradition. This

⁵⁰ Ellman, *The Poetics of Impersonality*, 95.

⁵¹ Harriet Davidson, *T. S. Eliot and Hermeneutics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 123.

⁵² Eliot, "The Waste Land," 79.

demand subtly subtends the text, and is characteristically voiced in a melancholic fashion. It is the effect of anxiety of influence as much as the loss of cognitive lineage that the modern experience enforces, *ergo* its pathetic character. From Dante and St Augustine to the Elizabethan dramatists, and from the Upanishads to Wagner and Baudelaire, the narrators masticate citational cultural clichés as reflections of the interlocking of differing aesthetic and experiential paradigms. All this is supposed to transpire on the basis of a putative co-sharing in essence. There is something disturbing in this need to affirm logocentrism in the mode of an oedipal entanglement with one's cultural ancestors. The reference to the Upanishads at the end, also, does not read like an exit from Eurocentrism, but signals the climax of a gradual sliding into primitive organicism.⁵³

It is telling that the last lines merge fragments that derive from incompatible historical and cultural paradigms. Dante, Gerard de Nerval, Thomas Kyd, a popular song, and the Upanishads are coerced into an uncanny co-existence.⁵⁴ It would be fallacious to claim that this *mélange* succeeds in establishing any organic continuity or synchronicity of these cultural smithereens on the basis of a co-sharing in essence fundamentals that subsists outside historical difference. It definitely succeeds in highlighting the desire for the resumption of differing cultural instances into an atemporal and ahistorical realm where language translates essence and experience is based on the cognitive grasp of

⁵³ See Ellman, "Eliot's Abjection," 195-6: "Here [in the last lines] at least the poem silences its western voice with eastern blessings. By striving towards a universal language, the poem is trying to recover the totalising spirit of imperialism from the savage scramble of First World War. But the text changes its exhausted English only for the jabber of miscegenated tongues, stammering its orisons in Babel." I do not think that exiting Eurocentrism has ever been the real issue behind this linguistic *pot pourri*, but even if it can be seen to be present, this exit would be more of a stifling amalgamation into a claustrophobic, regressive ancestral primordial realm.

⁵⁴ See the concluding lines 423-33, "The Waste Land," 79.

immutable invariants. It is symptomatic, however, that this trajectory speaks the language of affliction. Hurling historical fragments one against the other in order to lament the loss of experience while deploying a mythical sub-structure in order to affirm the simultaneity of experiential cores on the basis of a putative co-participation in essence, amounts to turning a problematic of history into theology. The text is transparent to its own antinomies, however, and solicits a reading that can potentially do full justice to the entanglement of its axes.

With respect to the self-defeating endeavour to use myth in order to ratchet up fragments of experience to an allegedly continuous culture and essence *in history*, I find Helen Gardner's views apposite: "There appears to be something in the Grail legend, as in Arthurian material generally, *that resists the ordering of plot*. The 'meanings' are always *overflowing* the narrative and overwhelming the design."⁵⁵ This "something" is the logic of the mytheme. The system in which both the predicament (the sterilisation of experience) and the hypothetical solution (the atemporal and ahistorical affirmation of common essence and organismic coding of experience) are inscribed defies origination. The mythological structure sustaining the narrative is a diacritical, relational, and self-referential language. In Claude Lévi-Strauss' words:

Themes can be split up *ad infinitum*.... Consequently the unity of the myth is never more than tendential and projective and cannot reflect a state or a particular moment of the myth. It is a phenomenon of the imagination resulting from the attempt at interpretation; and its function is to endow the myth with synthetic form and to prevent its disintegration into a confusion of opposites.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Gardner, "The Dry Season: 'The Waste Land'," 69; emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Wightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1969, 14.

Conclusively, in *The Waste Land* the narrational subjects engage in verbal expression neither in order to subjugate a resisting reality exterior and anterior to them nor to give vent to a self-coherent cogito that awaits its potentiation in and through the verbal moment. The dialectic of self-enhancement and self-erasure has reached a climactic point wherein the logic of prescribing depersonalisation in order to affirm history as essentialist detour is put under trial. I argue that the text constitutes a tensional field wherein history and its correlative notions of experience are seen to be antagonised by the linguistic parameter that would supposedly appease the subject's loss of cognitive coherence through the consolation of communication. The polyvalence of the deployed languages and idioms ensures that interlocution can only dissimulate the alleged communication of co-shared cognitive frames while covering up their tangential nature. Recourse to the pagan/mythical dimension cannot be an adequate response to the waning of conceptual plenitude and its concomitant aggravation of historical contents. We are presented with a perpetual displacement of successive traumatic scenes onto phenomenally archetypal ones which, nevertheless, interweave in such a way that the expectation to detect a generating origin is frustrated. The primal scene is itself synthetic, intuited only through its ripple effects. It is discernible in the amalgamation of differing mythemes that are moulded into a coherent whole only through the imposition of exegesis.

The Waste Land belabours the disturbing hypothesis that nothing relates to anything else except as an act of discourse, except as an aleatory event potentiated in discourse, drawing upon and simulating the arbitrariness of language's self-positing. The narrational subjects have undermined the outcome of their pursuit

through the homeopathic mode that determines it as perpetual recycling of contentless experience. *The Waste Land* could be read as the belabouring of the metamorphosis of the literal and singular into the historical and aesthetic, as a critical comment on the metamorphosis of ontic lexis into ontological logos and the conferral of totality upon the irreducibly self-positional and in-coherent. No wonder then that the desired fertility and conceptual abundance are not attained in the end. All one is left with is the sense-void formulaic repetition of fragments deriving from an alien language. The Eliotic subjects can only reiterate the non-assimilability of their experiential fragments. Even non-consensual sex is absorbed within resignation, within total moral ambivalence. The body, the ultimate metaphor of organic community, has turned into a violated inorganic aggregate of limbs.⁵⁷ This broken ensemble points to the fragmented understanding that hankers after the inhabiting of its concept. This inhabiting turns out to be impossible.

'My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised "a new start."
I made no comment. What should I resent?

'On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See Ellmann, "Eliot's Abjection," 186: "The victim, too, consents to degradation as if it were foredoomed 'Undone', the woman's body disintegrates into a synecdochic heap of knees, heart, feet, weirdly disorganized."

⁵⁸ "The Waste Land," 74.

The "Preludes": engaging the unthinkable

Baudelaire and Eliot's work tries to assimilate an experience at the limits of the tolerable and the expressible. This experience, however, is internally seen to be pure fiction when approached outside the jurisdiction of discourse. The Baudelairean subjects' mythical past that is contrasted with their present dejection is a phantasm of a life. The arch-concept that would hypothetically organise the Eliotic subjects' aleatory fragments of experience into meaningful wholes is deferred *ad infinitum* (see especially *The Waste Land*). The poetry can only belabour this phantasmatic experience and its correlative fabricated concept through the deployment of aphoristic fragmentation and the relinquishment of cumulative effects. The relaxation of the syntactic/hypotactic manner ideally effective of the cognitive sequencing of the discursive kernels is symptomatic and indicates the disavowal of principles of summation. The *Waste Land* is an instance of the sacrifice of the instant gratification of conceptual plenitude for the sake of a truth that does not gloss over the certainty of non-transcendable death and dispersal of essence.

The examined texts voice the hope for the recuperation on the level of style of what is lost on the level of history and experience. Their fragmented discursivity could be understood to have a cathartic effect. As Paul de Man has remarked: "By stating the inevitability of fragmentation in a mode that is itself fragmented, one restores the aesthetic unity of manner and substance..."⁵⁹ However, this is not the case here. The hope for unity is subliminally negotiated,

⁵⁹ De Man, "Preface," in *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, ix.

but no dialectical progression and/or historical totalisation can ever be attained. The desired recuperation of history and organicism through the deployment of fragmentary rituals and a homeopathic acting out which partakes of the dispersal it aims at negating, constitutes an attempt at mastery which obeys the logic of repetition-compulsion. The latter is always asymptotic vis-à-vis the traumatic referent it tries to absorb. The texts have critically anticipated and bracketed any attempt to affix them a historical index by problematising the very categories upon which such a periodisation must be conditional.

A desired coalescence with the natural object, at the same time, nostalgia for the origin of the object, permeates Preludes III and IV.

III

You tossed a blanket from the bed,
You lay upon your back, and waited;
You dozed and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted;
They flickered against the ceiling.
And when all the world came back
And the light crept up between the shutters,
And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,
You had such a vision of the street
As the street hardly understands;
Sitting along the bed's edge, where
You curled the papers from your hair,
Or clasped the yellow soles of feet
In the palms of both soiled hands.

IV

His soul stretched tight across the skies
That fade behind a city block,
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock;
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,
And evening newspapers, and eyes
Assured of certain certainties,

The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world.

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;
The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.⁶⁰

As de Man rightly remarks, such nostalgia can only exist “when the transcendental presence is forgotten.”⁶¹ The impossibility of delineating the referents' contours precisely points to a textually ingrained awareness of absence of empirically verifiable essentiality. This is an admission to which the poetic intention purports to be blind in order to exist as such at all. The *Preludes* exemplify the proleptic nature of a thought which perpetually projects the hypothesis of its possibility into an infinite future hoping to effect the recognition of the I by itself at the end of the course. The mechanism is one of *anagnorisis/recognition of self by self*.⁶² The frustrated crystallisation of the image (of the referent), a condition that characterises Eliot and Baudelaire's poetry to a considerable degree, and its fluid shaping, are due to the immanent inability of language to posit presence and essentialise the signified as something more than intended and morphic.⁶³ What triggers off the anagnoristic praxis is the entropic resistance to self-erasure. Meaning-intention is thus sedimented in terms of a series of “distinctive topoi of internalisation” which, as de Man has shown, inform

⁶⁰ Eliot, *Collected Poems*, 24-25.

⁶¹ De Man, “Intentional Structure of Image,” in *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 6.

⁶² See de Man, “Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics,” 770.

⁶³ See de Man, “The Intentional Structure of Image,” 6.

a field where *Er-innerung* (as hypothetical recollection of essential cores of experience) and *Gedächtnis* (as performative memory, devoid of sense and essence) interfuse in a condition of unappeasable tension.⁶⁴ An allegedly organic remembrance competes with one that voids the cognitive content of memories in the very act of mnemonic performance. What in other words is engaged in "Prelude IV," in the assurance of "certain certainties" and "The thousand sordid images / of which your soul was constituted," is the impossibility of securing the ownership of experience, and the coalescence of subject and cognitive predicate. Subjectivity in this case is a purely projective enterprise. Its predicates are projected onto natural givens without however the closure of personal attributes and encompassing reality-constants being fulfilled ["The thousand sordid images / Of which your soul was constituted; / They flickered against the ceiling"]. At times the text reads as if it negotiates the enmeshment of consciousness in its surrounding world, whereas at others it feels as if one is witnessing the unsettling projection of personological attributes onto an incorporeal insubstantial reality frame that fails to respond dialectically and thus stabilise consciousness. The impossibility of integrating experience into thought underlies the text as a subliminal constant.

"Prelude IV," but also Eliot's poetry in general, encodes the impossibility of attaining to an unmediated vision. The imagery accrues to an uncanny interplay of concreteness and pictorial vagueness that puts any grasp of transcendental

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See de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," 770.

organising principle in inverted commas.⁶⁵ The imagery creates a semantic unresolve that cannot be contained within the boundaries of exegetic understanding. Subsequently, the Prelude in question works through the de-concretisation of the referential matrix, its de-particularisation to the point where it becomes completely void of essence. This condition, however, far from signals the unhampered appropriation of reality to consciousness. It is not simply the ontological priority of the intended entity or idea that is interrogated here, but the very possibility of cognition-bound reference and the propositional logic sustaining it. In "Prelude IV" at stake in the relation between "these images" and an "infinitely suffering thing" is neither a symbolic transposition of contents nor a sublimation effect. The text enciphers the tension underwriting the symbiosis of image and concept or, rather, the illusional character of an operation which consists in reinscribing a literal and singular event within the fulcrum of conceptual summation. In moving from the emotive to the abstract dimension in the examined extract the movement leading to signification and ideality is brought to the fore. The transition from the figural/imagistic to the conceptual/infinite is significant as it signals the identification of thing-cum-notion/image as the natural ally of ideality. It is thus the transference from the figural to the ideal that is mediated by the interpolation of the emotive dimension ["I am *moved* by fancies

⁶⁵ The incorporeality of several of Eliot's images ("His soul stretched tight across the skies"), combined with their disturbing proximity to typical urban modalities of fear and repulsion that are more concrete brings to mind what Foucault writes apropos of Deleuze's struggle with a philosophy of surfaces and phantasmatic scenes. As is the case with Eliot, the images are never primarily, or exclusively, symptomatological. They inseminate the emergence of a dialectic between the realms of the amorphous and the schematic with unsettling implications. See Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 169: "We must articulate a philosophy of the phantasm that cannot be reduced to a primordial fact through the intermediary of perception or an image ... in short, ... what Deleuze would perhaps not allow us to call its '*incorporeal materiality*.'" It is useless to seek a more substantial truth behind the

..."]. However, this transferential gesture never stabilises a negativity to be ideally shared by the semantically intended concept and the "real" referent. As Paul de Man has remarked in the context of the distinction between rhetoric and symbol in Kant, "in each case, the resulting undecidability is due to the asymmetry of the binary model that opposes the figural to the proper meaning of the figure."⁶⁶ The figure is never appropriated to its proper meaning non-residually.

phantasm, a truth to which it points as a rather confused sign (thus, the futility of 'symptomalogizing')" (emphasis added).

⁶⁶ Paul de Man, "The Epistemology of Metaphor," in S. Sacks ed., *On Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 26.

Epilogue

Scepticism towards reducing (poetic) discourse to a vehicle of cognition is not a sign of rarefaction of thought but the indication, however oblique, of the *emancipation of language from content*⁶⁷ and the resistance to construing it in terms of "an incarnation of thought."⁶⁸ The fact that the negative recognition of finitude occurs within the interstices of the ontic lexis does not constitute a contradiction in terms or an antinomy. My aim has not been to affirm the absolute extraneity of meaning to language, or prove that the two are in a state of irreparable mutual exclusiveness. The reality that I believe the poetry controverts concerns the alleged mutual contingency of cognition and reference on the basis of a solid grasp of immutable reality essences upon which they both draw and legitimate their bond. Baudelaire and Eliot's poetry problematises the passage from perception to cognition, from reference to cognition, from ontic lexis to ontological logos. This way, it does not simply showcase the encroachment of language upon the cementing of cognition, this latter being an invariant behind most realistic linguistics and pragmatic theories of communication anyway. The sinister undercurrents of the texts emanate from the admission of an undercurrent of incomprehensibility ingrained within reason. The realisation that the subject does not "own" his/her experience but must re-elaborate it *ad infinitum* in the interest of self-preservation problematises any notion of historical understanding that presupposes invariants of historical reality and constants of human consciousness. Eliot's essays, however, instantiate a typical reaction to the poetic insights. I have tried to clarify the subsensical layer of essentialism within his

⁶⁷ See Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 384.

⁶⁸ De Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," in *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 79.

poetic texts as much as their palinodic confrontation of it both at the level of form and theme.

The poetry does not come up with a panache proposition, nor does it address the dissolution of collective codings of reality as if it were a catastrophe. I have argued that the melancholia that Baudelaire's texts give off does not indicate mourning over the collapse of experience. The sadness permeating this poetry is one over the cognitive barrenness left behind by the waning of reality's experiencability and the asymmetrical rapport of social forces within his contemporary historical conjuncture. Baudelaire's double resistance towards both aestheticism and historicism has an euphoric and liberating aspect about it that has been hushed up. His work neither celebrates transgression as a means prerequisite to re-establishing a new order, nor capitulates to the political and ethical hegemony. This stance is not wilful succumbing to social reification but the basis for a futural renegotiation of human praxis in non-essentialist terms.

Paul de Man has criticised, in "Shelley Disfigured," a logic that aims at extending the "instantaneousness of the act of [linguistic self-] positing over a series of transformations" through the imposition of an organicist and linear-temporal axis. But at the same time, "the initial violence of position can only be half-erased, since the erasure is accompanied by a device of language that never ceases to partake of the very violence against which it is directed."⁶⁹ The self-undermining nature of this imposition allows insight into the aporias of signification and performance. What I consider the examined poetry to realise is an acting out: "language posits and language means but language cannot posit

⁶⁹ De Man, *Shelley Disfigured*, 118-9.

meaning.”⁷⁰ I believe this inability of language to posit meaning in absolute terms to be the true theme of the texts. It has assumed various allegorical forms in Baudelaire, has been geared to the terrain of ethical conflict and sexual frustration, and always in the context of a fluid and dispersed subjectivity. It has been endowed a mythical form in Eliot and then the false consolation of transcendence, and always as the proleptic and ultimately abortive positing of a conceptual stability that cannot be fully inhabited.

Conclusively, Eliot's poetry addresses historical grounding not as an object of stable cognition but as a series of re-investments of kernels obeying language's logic of the recurrence of pure anteriority, the economy of desire and asymptotic memory. One cannot tease out the historico-temporal dimension in terms of indivisible atoms of essence lining up into the present unity of time and history. The inner-poetic realisation of experiential disintegration does not produce a larger conceptual framework accruing upon an awareness to the second degree. The allegorical gaze that discerns the historical character of experiential debris, just as in Baudelaire, binds the fragments of an ever-receding full life into serial concatenations of experiences that cannot accrue mutually. No “days of recollection”⁷¹ transpire in order to compel the collective integration of one's experiences. The situation, however, is not one whose potential should be defined in existential or afflictive terms.

Baudelaire's poetry elaborates the assumption that performative memory fabricates its own referents. It imbues them with a pseudo-genetic potential, with a sense of lost plenitude of contents, and ultimately it produces the sense of guilt

⁷⁰ De Man, “Shelley Disfigured,” 117.

⁷¹ Benjamin, *Baudelaire*, 139.

and suffering whose offspring it is supposed to be. Revisionist memory ensures that the its referents will never be endowed with cognitive afflatus and historical verification. The same applies to a certain extent to Eliot's work. From:

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,

via

And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
My cousin's, he took me on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.

and

'You gave me Hyacinths first a year ago;
'They called me the hyacinth girl.'
Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

to

These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih⁷²

the same condition of unresolved tension between memories that do not illuminate one another is encountered. The temptation to resume experience under an overarching historical horizon is not given in to. Eliot and Baudelaire's poetry resists its own totalising impulses. Their counter-memories do not restore a previous life and do not guarantee the comprehensibility of a future one. Eliot's "sudden

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"The Waste Land," in *Collected Poems*, 63, 64, 79 respectively.

illumination"⁷³ and the moment of shock and surprise, even of terror, "which can never be forgotten, but which is never repeated integrally,"⁷⁴ point to the traumatic impact of modern experience that is guaranteed by the collapse of over-arching explanatory frameworks. I have argued that the particular inflections that this collapse assumes is a matter of historical conjuncture. However, the modern exacerbation of testimonial unaccountability has had a retroactive destructive effect on any nostalgic affirmation of a past condition of sense plenitude. The semiotic and diacritical character of language and memory preclude any such condition and necessitate the perpetual elaboration of the aesthetic, moral, and political space that they liberate in the form of a threatening emptiness. Baudelaire and Benjamin's mnemonic and/or dialectical images flaring up at moments of crisis encode the inherent forgetting at the heart of historical experience that makes it recognisable as experience only later on.⁷⁵ They try to turn the re-enactment of trauma into a constructive moment of awareness of something once fully owned and subsequently lost that will redress the historical balance. Baudelaire's poetry, however, has revealed the fragility of experience and of the mnemonic operation aiming at its inhabiting. Eliot's poetic work, *pace* his literary criticism, has forcibly revealed that the site of history and subjectivity is the site of trauma, the site opened up by the constitutive non-assimilability of human experience within vaulting cognitive frameworks. It shows that history marks a traumatic grid of space and time that can only be met after the event of its

⁷³ See Eliot, "Four Quartets," 208.

⁷⁴ Eliot, "Dante," 216.

⁷⁵ See Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed., Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 8: "For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not

occurrence, after the core wherein it is supposed to fold in upon itself either as transcendent essence or as referent of experience has turned out to be phantasmatic. The homeopathic confrontation of what is felt to be an unbearable dispersal of essence and subjectivity with resorting to a spurious essentialist and integratist simultaneous historical order spells out its desperate nature in the form of a repetition-compulsion that never fills up the void of testimony. Both poets' works have shown themselves to be irretrievably marked by the trauma they addressed.⁷⁶ Trauma cannot but disseminate its sense-depleting ripple effects in the deceptive mode of an understanding that is blind to its own enabling conditions. Benjamin's "crystal of the total event"⁷⁷ encases no organising core of experience in its absolute diaphaneity, the same way Baudelaire's memories narrate their inability to coincide with their referents. The fragile subject that is the carrier of these memories is forced to perpetually re-negotiate the terms of the contract that binds him to history in an attempt to master the randomness of the events that hit him as trauma. The palimpsestic inscription of mnemonic and experiential traits impels one to embrace the difference internal to experience and temporality and defines Baudelaire's notion of *nouveauté*. In "The Painter of Modern Life," openness to one's own historical era wins over the attachment to the canons of the past.⁷⁸ This resumes the essence of modernity for Baudelaire. The challenge that his poetry mandates, and to which an adequate response is still

fully perceived as it occurs; ... a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence."

⁷⁶ See Kevin Newmark, "Traumatic Poetry: Charles Baudelaire and the Shock of Laughter," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 254.

⁷⁷ See Benjamin, "Konvolut N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," 461: "That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event."

⁷⁸ See "The Painter of Modern Life," 402-6.

called for, is to move beyond the “restoration of mortality by autobiography”⁷⁹ and directly confront the “paranoid fear that characterizes the hermeneutics and the pedagogy of lyric poetry.”⁸⁰ Baudelaire ends “Le Voyage” with a direct confrontation of death and the incentive to face experience not as the return of the same, the known, the cognitively preempted, but as the radically new. The non-assimilation of experience within vaulting cognitive and moral frameworks is thus embraced: “Au fond de l’Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau* ! [In the depths of the Unknown in order to find the *new*!.]” (OC I: 134). I have emphasised his destructive discursive potential that blasts out historical continua without affirming either extra-historical moorings in essence or a notion of sterilised aesthetics cut off from historical consciousness. The redemptive aspect of his work may have been overwhelmed by the destructive impact of his language, but it is subtly there and intermingles with the latter’s inexhaustible challenge to de-sublimate, and ultimately embrace, aleatoriness, finitude and loss of essence.

⁷⁹ See De Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” 81.

⁸⁰ De Man, “Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric,” 259.

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